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**US Air Force lessons in Counterinsurgency:
EXPOSING VOIDS IN DOCTRINAL GUIDANCE**

BY

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Abstract

As it has so often in the past, the United States military and the Air Force will undoubtedly provide support across the globe to countries combating insurgents in the future. The host nation political and military organization and command and control structure governing the deployment and employment of air forces in these wars will have a large impact on the success or failure of air operations, and perhaps the national counterinsurgency effort overall. Because of the delicate political nature of wars of insurgency, US involvement in these counterinsurgency operations may be indirect or direct, and may include actual combat operations. Whichever the case, US airmen may be asked to step into either an existing structure, or help develop a counterinsurgency air operations architecture and strategy to direct the actions of host nation and/or US air assets. To help educate airmen about the realities of counterinsurgency, this study addresses how insurgent warfare is fundamentally different from conventional wars, develops lessons from two case studies, highlights the challenges that US airmen face, and examines the adequacy of Air Force and Joint doctrine for counterinsurgency operations.

Chapter 1

Introduction

*I would say the Air Force has the hardest problem in deciding on a doctrine for this kind of thing because of the nature of the Air Force. ...It is hard to know just how you can define the Air Force role, in unconventional warfare, particularly since every place is going to be different...*¹

—General Maxwell D. Taylor

General Taylor aptly described one of the greatest challenges of unconventional warfare when he said, “every place is going to be different.” He was commenting in reference to America’s involvement in the counterinsurgency war in South Vietnam, one of the many wars in which US forces supported counterinsurgency operations or actually fought against insurgents. This study addresses how insurgent warfare is fundamentally different from conventional wars, develops lessons learned from two case studies, and highlights the challenges that US airmen face and examines the adequacy of doctrine for counterinsurgency operations.

Insurgencies: Not Uncommon

American military forces are no strangers to counterinsurgency operations. In the twentieth century alone, the United States supplied aid or forces in over sixty different

¹ General Maxwell D. Taylor, transcript of oral history interview by Major Richard B. Clement and Jacob Van Staaveren, 11 Jan 1972, 19, US Air Force Historical Research Agency, Maxwell Air Force Base, AL.

conflicts, many of which were counterinsurgencies. Among others, these conflicts included the Philippines at the turn of the century, Nicaragua in the early 1930s, Greece in the late 1940s, the Philippines again in the 1950s, Vietnam in the 1960s, and El Salvador in the 1980s²

In the early 1960s, President John F. Kennedy recognized the threat of insurgent warfare in the world of superpower stand-offs. He described his perception of insurgencies to the West Point graduating class of 1962:

This is another type of war, new in its intensity, ancient in its origins—war by guerrillas, subversives, insurgents, assassins. War by ambush instead of combat; by infiltration instead of aggression; seeking victory by eroding and exhausting the enemy instead of engaging him....It requires...a wholly new kind of strategy; a wholly new kind of force and therefore a new and different kind of military training.³

Realizing that insurgent warfare was not uncommon and posed a real and complex threat to US interests, in 1961 President Kennedy requested the Defense Department assess the threat and reorient doctrine and training to include counterinsurgency.⁴

Even today we see insurgencies in Central America, splinter groups struggling to assert independence in the Balkans and nations such as Great Britain and Israel continuing to wrestle with conflicts in Northern Ireland and the southern Lebanon, respectively. In the foreseeable future, it is unlikely that the threat posed by insurgent groups will fade away. Guided by the US National Security Strategy to protect and

² John M. Collins, *America's Small Wars: Lessons for the Future* (Washington D.C.: Brassey's Inc, 1991), 20-21. Collins offers an excellent review of US involvement in low-intensity conflicts.

³ Willam P. Yarborough, "Counterinsurgency: The U.S. Role—Past, Present, and Future", in *Guerrilla Warfare and Counterinsurgency*, ed. Richard H. Shultz, Jr., et al (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1989), 103-104.

⁴ "Urgent National Needs: Special Message of the President to the Congress," Department of State Bulletin 44 (12 June 1961), 906.

promote democratic societies, America's interests will likely continue to be linked in some form or fashion to helping allied nations deal with internal struggles.

Insurgencies in the Abstract

Arguably, President Kennedy ushered in a resurgence of American military thought for meeting the threat of insurgencies, but the concept of insurgent warfare, and its guerrilla-style tactics, has a long tradition. As early as 350 BC the Chinese General Sun Tzu, in his work *The Art of War*, advocated integrating political theory into military strategy.⁵ Sun Tzu advised using time rather than force to subdue an enemy and many of his teachings developed the thought that the greatest military skill was avoiding the battle and subduing opponents through psychological warfare.

Mao Tse-Tung, a modern student of Sun Tzu, was arguably the father of protracted revolutionary warfare. In his works, Mao constantly preached that revolutions must galvanize the support of the people and the revolutionary movement must survive until its forces are strong enough to fight on conventional terms.⁶ Mao believed that insurgent forces should be on the strategic defensive until enough support and military strength existed to go on the offensive. Mao termed the transition period from strategic defensive to counteroffensive as the strategic stalemate stage. Many modern scholars argue that most successful insurgencies follow Mao's model of a three-phase war.⁷

⁵ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Ralph D. Sawyer (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994)

⁶ Mao Tsetung, *Six Essay on Military Affairs* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1972), 21 and Samuel B. Griffith, II, Brigadier General, USMC, *Mao Tse-Tung on Guerrilla Warfare* (Baltimore, MD: The Nautical & Aviation Publishing Company of America, 1992), 71.

⁷ For fundamentals of insurgency see, for example, John S. Pustay, Major, USAF, *Counterinsurgency Warfare* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1965; Molnar, Andrew R. et al., *Underground in Insurgent, Revolutionary, and Resistance Warfare* (Washington, D.C.: Special Operations Research Office, 1963); Giap, Vo Nguyen, *People's War, People's Army* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1962); Peter Paret and John W. Shy, *Guerrillas in the 1960's* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1962);

Mao's first phase, the strategic defensive, involves developing the infrastructure of the insurgent movement: recruiting, organizing and equipping combat elements. Building secure bases of operations and indoctrinating civilians into the cause and beliefs of the insurgent organization also occur in the first phase. In the second, or stalemate phase, irregular forces harass the government security forces with guerilla tactics, expand insurgent bases for support and sabotage key government facilities. The key to successful operations for the insurgents is to avoid the costly big battles and engage in operations that legitimize their existence in the eyes of the civilian population. The counter-offensive, or third phase, transitions from guerilla operations to more conventional military operations. In this phase, the insurgency has gained political momentum and developed a military infrastructure capable of engaging and surviving direct military contact with regular security forces. John Pustay describes these three phases as moving from the initial stages of subversion and infiltration to the final outcome of civil war.⁸

Insurgencies: Fundamentally Different

In fact, an insurgency in its purest sense is nothing more than armed revolution against the established political order. However, insurgencies rarely exist in a vacuum and are often influenced by external aid to the insurgents, the established government, or both. Professor Dennis Drew describes five characteristics of insurgent warfare that make it fundamentally different than conventional war.⁹

⁸ Pustay, 5 (Pustay retired as a lieutenant general).

⁹ The following five paragraphs are distilled from, Dennis M. Drew, U.S. Airpower Theory and the Insurgent Challenge: A Short Journey to Confusion, *The Journal of Military History*, 62 (October 1998), 810-811 and *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency—American Military Dilemmas and Doctrinal Proposals*,” CADRE Paper No. 88-1 (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, March 1988). Professor Drew, a

1. . Protractedness: Insurgents use time as a weapon to weaken the government. They need time to build their infrastructure, as in Phase I, and prove legitimacy. As long as the insurgency can remain viable, it demonstrates to the people that the government does not control its own destiny, and that the insurgent cause is legitimate.
2. . Civilian-military “duality” of insurgent strategy: Drew makes the point that the government must win both the political and military sides of the struggle. However, the insurgents only have to win one struggle or the other.
3. . Guerilla tactics: Insurgents weave in and out of the shadows of the civilian population. They choose the time and place of the encounter and “melt away” to minimize their military cross-section for targeting by the government. In doing so, they offer few, if any, opportunities for the government to strike and reduce their numbers.
4. . Logistics: As opposed to conventional armies with their support lines stretched out behind the battlefield, insurgents draw their sustenance from the very population they seek to recruit. In this regard, insurgents offer no lucrative “supply depot” or “power stations”, but rather they share the same fields and footpaths used by the civilians.
5. . Centers of gravity: Most importantly, both the government and insurgents have the same “center of gravity”—the people. To be successful, the political infrastructure of the insurgency *necessarily* relies on the population for the above-mentioned needs. The government likewise necessarily requires the loyalty of the general population.¹⁰

The key is that insurgent wars, though they may involve limited combat operations, are a struggle for the hearts and minds of the people. In the middle of the struggle—as participant, bystander and victim—is the civilian population.

Counterinsurgency: The US Airman’s Challenge

From a US airman’s perspective, Drew’s five characteristics of insurgency warfare offer unique challenges. First, the protractedness of insurgency warfare requires long-term commitment by the US and requires airmen to take the long view of the conflict. America’s penchant for quick, decisive victories may pressure US military advisors to provide aid that the host nation is unable to use effectively. US funding may ebb and

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¹⁰ For additional readings on counterinsurgency see, for example, Roger Trinquier, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1961); David Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1964); Julian Paget, *Counter-Insurgency*

flow depending on the whim of the Congress. In the middle of temporal quandary, Air Force advisors must provide credible recommendations that are consistent with host nation objectives and that account for expected US support.

Second, the duality of the conflict often places the advisor in a position of advocating not only military options, but economic, social and political alternatives as well. Because the legitimate government must win both the military and political struggles, Air Force advisors must be cognizant of the causes of the country's internal conflict. Airpower's successful contribution to the struggle is likely to hinge more on psychological operations and social reform programs than physically destroying the insurgents.

Third, guerrilla tactics make it difficult to target the insurgents. The insurgents, members of the population in rebellion, can blend in with the local civilians. This ability makes it difficult for military forces, especially airborne firepower, to discriminate between friend and foe. With friend and foe intermingled, air attacks on ground formations commonly lead to injury or death of civilians. Civilian casualties tend to place the government in an unfavorable light, both internally and internationally, and weaken its claims to legitimacy.

Fourth, insurgents provide few lucrative logistics targets. They exist in the same villages, towns and countryside as the civilian populations and most resources they require for sustenance come from the local populace. Insurgents may receive aid and supplies, especially weapons and ammunition, from a third-party country, and these may produce some interdiction targets. However, efforts to interdict externally-supplied aid may not be politically feasible.

Campaigning (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1967); Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1966).

Finally, winning the hearts and minds of the people may offer the greatest challenge. Insurgents, and governments alike, succeed by gaining and holding political legitimacy, which is grounded in the support of the people. This compels the government to address the social issues that caused the insurgency. In this regard, the military may actually become a hindrance, painted as a symbol of oppression by the insurgents. Securing this center of gravity, the people's support, often has little to do with applying firepower.

Methodology of this Study

In the following chapters I will examine the experiences of US airmen in combating insurgencies and contrast current counterinsurgency doctrine with reality. In chapters Two and Three I will look at the reality of airpower in counterinsurgency two case studies. Chapter Two focuses on Operation FARMGATE, a four-year operation initiated in late 1961, which involved upgrading South Vietnamese air combat capability, training their personnel, and flying with South Vietnamese forces during combat operations. The lessons from this era are recounted in the volumes of information collected from Project CHECO reports and the CORONA HARVEST program.¹¹ Chapter Three provides a similar look at the war in El Salvador from 1981 through 1992. Whereas US operations eventually dominated the war in South Vietnam, the conflict in El Salvador offers a study of limited US involvement over an extended period of time.

Chapter Four examines current Air Force and Joint counterinsurgency doctrine for its perspective on counterinsurgency wars and how US armed forces should respond. This

¹¹ Project CHECO (Contemporary Historical Evaluation of Combat Operations) and CORONA HARVEST were both programs initiated by the US Air Force to collect and preserve information related to operations in Southeast Asia. Project CHECO studies focused specifically on lessons learned for combat while CORONA HARVEST earmarked unit histories, end of tour reports, lessons learned, significant administrative orders, and any written record deemed to be of possible benefit for future analysis.

chapter also provides a cursory review of Army and Marine Corps counterinsurgency doctrine. The last chapter measures doctrine against reality and includes the conclusions and recommendations for changes to current doctrine based on the comparisons of actual events and guidance available today.

Limitations of the Study

This study primarily explores the airman's role in counterinsurgencies and the issues that affect integration and performance of air forces. Research for both case studies was limited to unclassified, English-based sources. For the case of Operation FARMGATE, the Air Force Historical Research Agency proved invaluable with its seemingly limitless supply of archived records from the Vietnam era. Projects CHECO and CORONA HARVEST includes recorded interviews, end of tour reports, and unit histories. Unfortunately, the air war in El Salvador did not generate such a plethora of written sources. However, a good deal of information on the air war in El Salvador can be gathered from open source journals, articles, books and reports. In addition, the author interviewed various personnel involved with the El Salvadoran conflict.

Chapter 2

South Vietnamese Counterinsurgency Campaign and Operation FARMGATE, 1961-1964

“If you can visualize the Air Force building a cotton picker and then sending it out to Vietnam to pick apples, and then...they changed the mission and this cotton picker they have picking apples is now supposed to pick oranges. This is somewhat the situation we are in.”¹²

Lt Col M.M. Doyle, Commander Det 2 (FARMGATE),
1st Air Commando Group

Origins of Conflict

The French colonial involvement in Indochina began in the 19th century, but for practical purposes, the struggle of the Vietnamese against the French began in earnest at the end of World War II. Led by Ho Chi Minh, the Communist Viet Minh directed guerrilla activities against the French in efforts to gain independence from France. For most of the next decade, France fought the Viet Minh, lost support from home, and eventually lost the national will to continue the struggle. To oversee the provision of emergency assistance and military upgrades to the French, the US stood up the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) in Saigon in 1950.¹³ President Eisenhower, unsure of Britain's support for US intervention and also unsure of the extent of China's

¹² Lt Col M.M. Doyle, Commander Det 2 (FARMGATE), transcript of oral interview by J. Grainger, 16 February 1963, Bien Hoa AB, Vietnam (included in History, Second Air Division, 15 November 1961-8 October 1962, Vol III (Supporting Documents), 195.)

involvement in the crisis, balked at supporting France with combat action.¹⁴ After a crushing French defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, the Viet Minh, the French and other interested parties signed the Geneva Accords. The Accords divided Vietnam at the 17th parallel, left the Viet Minh in control of the northern portion, required the withdrawal of adversary troops from either side of the demarcation line, and called for national elections in 1956 to unify the country (the elections were never held.)

During this same decade, the world also saw many other communist-backed insurgencies and aggressions throughout the world: the Greek civil war, the Berlin blockade, the Hukbong insurgency in the Philippines, the coup in Czechoslovakia and the war in Korea. Eisenhower assumed the Viet Minh would not rest until all of Vietnam was under communist control so by 1956, the US had replaced the French as the benefactor, supplier and trainer of the newly created Republic of Vietnam (RVN) south of the 17th parallel. Eisenhower approved the gradual build-up of US advisors and supplies to RVN to increase its domestic counterinsurgency capability and prepare it for the expected onslaught from North Vietnam.

Kennedy inherited US involvement in Vietnam with the backdrop of Chiang Kai-shek's retreat to Formosa in 1949, the stalemate for Korea in the 1950s, and the failure in Cuba with the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961. Knowing that the US reputation was on the line, and sensing the rising tide of wars for "national liberation," Kennedy was determined to demonstrate credibility and commitment with the US resolve in South Vietnam, to contain communism and prevent other regional Asian countries from falling

¹³ Robert F. Futrell, *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia: The Advisory Years to 1965* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1981), 7.

¹⁴ Robert S. McNamara, *In Retrospect, The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (New York: Times Books, 1995), 37.

victim to the communist “domino” effect. One of the first steps Kennedy took was the introduction of the FARMGATE detachment into South Vietnam to assist in their counterinsurgency efforts.

Overview of FARMGATE

Program Inception

In April 1961 Tactical Air Command activated the 4400th Combat Crew Training Squadron (CCTS) at Eglin Air Force Base. The squadron, code named “Jungle Jim”, had a mission to train Air Force personnel to conduct counterinsurgency operations. Seven months later in November 1961, a detachment of the 4400 CCTS deployed to Bien Hoa AB, Vietnam to assist in training the Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF), to develop more effective tactics and techniques, as well as to supplement the VNAF strike capability.¹⁵ This detachment of the 4400 CCTS was designated FARMGATE, and later designated Det 2A. The initial deployment of FARMGATE included 151 officers, 8 T-28s, 4 SC-47s, and 4 RB-26s.¹⁶ FARMGATE came under the operational control of Det 7, 13th Air Force which carried the classified title of 2nd Advance Squadron (ADVON.)

¹⁵ History, 2nd ADVON, 15 November 1961-8 October 1962, 1. Operation FARMGATE is alternatively referred to as FARMGATE, 1st Air Commando Squadron, Det 2, and Det 2A. All titles refer to the squadron of US personnel stationed at Bien Hoa Air Base, specifically assigned to fly with and train the VNAF.

¹⁶ Arthur C. O’Neill, Chief, Historical Division, Office of Information, *Fifth Air Force in the Southeast Asia Crisis (A Sequel)*, 30 January 1962, 30. Instructions came from PACAF that all B-26 spares including engines, would be shipped to Clark AFB in the Philippines, all markings would be removed and the material marked for “Project Farm Gate.” The material was to be picked up on that depot’s account as “found on base.” The C-47s were cargo aircraft, configured for supply drops and psychological operations; the B-26s were twin-engine World War II attack bombers and carried the designation “RB-26” to denote reconnaissance capability, thereby circumventing the 1955 peace agreement precluding introduction of bomber aircraft; the T-28s were single-engine training aircraft, modified to carry machine guns, rockets and bombs (Philip D. Chinnery, *Any Time, Any Place: Fifty Years of the USAF Air Commando and Special Operations Forces, 1944-1994* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1994), 68.)

Concept of Operations

The Pacific Air Forces (PACAF) Operations plan established two requirements for FARMGATE: train the Vietnamese in counterinsurgency and develop/confirm tactics and techniques for counterinsurgency operations.¹⁷ An implied mission was to do the things the Vietnamese could not do, such as augment their operations with unique night strike capabilities.¹⁸ In theory, the C-47s were to conduct aerial re-supply, air drop paratroopers and perform psychological warfare operations. The T-28s and B-26s were to conduct close air support, interdiction and armed reconnaissance.¹⁹

At the time of deployment, the FARMGATE personnel faced two of their greatest hurdles: a hazy understanding of the mission and a poor air support infrastructure in Vietnam. Initial operations were conceived for insurgency operations, not counterinsurgency operations. Aircrew trained for and expected to be used in situations behind enemy lines, going into small, unprepared fields and delivering special teams or equipment to small units.²⁰ Additionally, when the FARMGATE pilots first arrived, South Vietnam had no Joint Operations Center (JOC) from which air support operations could be centrally directed. The rudimentary command and control system used by the South Vietnamese did not provide adequate real-time airpower response to ground

¹⁷ FARMGATE carried the training function as a cover, while the covert mission was to support VNAF actions against the Viet Cong within the borders of South Vietnam (Message, TSC-PFOCC-S 61-170, Commander, Pacific Air Forces to Commander, to Commander, 13th Air Force, 4 December 1961 (included in Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, Part V-A, Supporting Documents, October-December 1963.)

¹⁸ Doyle, 23.

¹⁹ Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, Part V, Air Operations October 1961-December 1963. The B-26 was configured to perform photo reconnaissance whereas the T-28 was limited to a visual reconnaissance role.

²⁰ Major General Rollen H. Anthis, Commander 2nd Air Division, transcript of oral interview by Major Dean S. Gausche and J. W. Grainger, 30 August 1963, Air Force Historical Research Agency, Maxwell AFB, AL (included in Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, Appendix 2, COIN Interviews October 1961-December 1963.)

activity. An outpost could be under attack and an airplane might not get on target for six days. The 2nd ADVON established a JOC, but the Vietnamese and United States Army advisors were reluctant to use the capability until they trusted USAF air support to succeed in the conditions of South Vietnam. To gain the trust of both the Vietnamese military and US Army advisors, airmen were forced to put on capability demonstrations to display what airpower could do. It was “a great deal of our effort during the first few months.”²¹

Analysis of Operations

US Air Force Involvement

Prior to 1962, military operations in Vietnam came under the purview of the Military Assistance Advisory Group-Vietnam (MAAG.) The primary function of the MAAG was to oversee training and assistance to South Vietnam. In response to President Kennedy’s support for increased US involvement, for expansion of the Vietnamese armed forces and US advisory and support role, Commander in Chief Pacific (CINCPAC) established the US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (USMACV) in February 1962. This reorganization placed direct responsibility for all US military policy, operations and assistance to the Republic of Vietnam under one organization.²² Operating under the assumption that MACV would be withdrawn once the Viet Cong insurgency was brought under control, MAAG was retained in hopes of resuming its former mission, though after

²¹ Doyle interview, 192.

²² History, CINCPAC, 1962, 153.

MACV stood up, it concentrated on the mission of administering the Military Assistance Program (MAP).²³

US Air Force assets resided with the 2nd ADVON, later designated the 2nd Air Division.²⁴ The 2nd ADVON commander, Brigadier General Rollin H. Anthis, was triple-hatted in responsibility. In addition to commanding Det 7 (2nd ADVON), he also commanded the Air Section of the Military Assistance Advisory Group and later served as Air Component Commander for all of Southeast Asia (SEA).²⁵ Although he did not control the air attaché staffs, his authority did extend to the various detachments under the 2nd ADVON. One detachment of significance was Det 8, located at Tan Son Nhut AB near the capital city, Saigon. Det 8 operated the combat reporting center, heavy radar, a photo processing cell, and the JOC. 2nd ADVON was also responsible for all temporary duty (TDY) and permanent party USAF personnel within these units.

FARMGATE reported to Commander, Pacific Air Forces through the 2nd ADVON and 13th Air Force. However, the detachment attempted to coordinate augmentation directly through the Special Air Warfare Center (SAWC), the parent organization of the 4400 CCTS at Eglin. To curb “end-around” activity, the PACAF commander informed the 2nd ADVON that any coordination of this nature needed to be defined by PACAF.²⁶ The subordination of FARMGATE operations to the 2nd ADVON may have clarified the

²³ Major General George S. Echhardt, *Command and Control 1950-1969*, Vietnam Studies (Washington D.C.: Department of the Army, 1974), 28.

²⁴ Reference to 2nd ADVON or 2nd Air Division is used throughout this chapter. The 2nd Air Division designation occurred in October 1962. Use of ADVON or Air Division is merely an indication of the time period in question.

²⁵ O'Neill, 15. The designation of Air Component Commander was a role under the command structure of USMACV.

²⁶ History, Tactical Air Command, 1 July-31 December 1962, 118.

command and control of the unit, however, over time it resulted in “a decrease in support from SAWC in terms of weapons development, tactics, techniques, etc.”²⁷

Army of the Republic of Vietnam

In 1961, South Vietnam was divided into four Corps areas, which were further divided into nine Tactical Zones. Since South Vietnam did not have an overall theater commander, its corps commanders operated nearly autonomously, reporting directly to the South Vietnamese President.²⁸ The responsibility for regular military operations fell under the domain of the division commander assigned to each tactical zone. Each zone embraced numerous provinces, which were the power base of the civilian administration in Vietnam.²⁹ The provinces were further subdivided into districts, villages and hamlets, with hamlets being the smallest administrative unit. The province chief administered the province but also had the Civil Guard and Self Defense Corps under his control, two paramilitary organizations with widely varying degrees of professionalism and military capability.³⁰

A major difficulty in command and control often arose between the division commander and the province chief. Though the division commander was granted complete control of military matters within the tactical zone, the province chief had a

²⁷ Colonel Franklin, chief, PACAF Assistance Team, memorandum to HQ 2nd Air Division, subject: Special Assistance Inspection, September 1964, 9 (included in History, 2nd Air Division, January-June 1964, Chapter Two, USAF Operations (Supporting Documents.))

²⁸ William W. Momyer, General, USAF (Ret), *The Vietnamese Air Force, 1951-1975, An Analysis of its Role in Combat*, USAF Southeast Asia Monograph Series, Volume 3, Monograph 4, Lt Col Charles McDonald and Major A.J.C. Lavalley, eds., (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975), 9.

²⁹ A “province” corresponded roughly to a “state” in the US, however, the province chief was appointed by the country’s president.

³⁰ As of 1962, both the Civil Guard and Self Defense Corps organizations were supported by US Military Assistance Programs. Robert M. Gurfield, Operations Analyst and Richard T. Sanborn, Chief, Operations Analysis, Operations Analysis Memorandum No. 2, Air Request System and Supporting Communications, 2nd Air Division, 27 October 1962, 5.

non-military channel to appeal *each decision* of the division commander straight to the president if he so desired. This system forced division commanders to seek the concurrence of the province chief with most military matters, especially if combat operations were involved. The caveat was that the province chief could initiate paramilitary operations without the concurrence of the division commander.³¹ There was a notable interplay of personalities involved between rival provinces attempting to exert control over the military to establish a power base.

Vietnamese Air Force

The Vietnamese Air Force was limited in numbers and capability well into mid-1960, although VNAF pilots did train and employ in US supplied aircraft in the FARMGATE missions. In 1961, the Vietnamese attack air force consisted of propeller-driven A-1s and F-8Fs.³² They also possessed L-19s, C-47s and a few H-19s. Although the VNAF held a place in the Ministry of Defense, the Commander of the Armed Forces was also the General of the Army. In addition, the rank structure favored the Army. For comparison, an ARVN division commander was a full colonel, the same rank as the commander of the entire VNAF in 1961, Colonel Vien.

The size and status of the VNAF meant it was not a force for strategic attack, nor did it have the infrastructure (intelligence, radar, and communications) to support large-scale combat operations. The air-ground coordination and training prior to 1962 was

³¹ Gurfield, *Air Request System*, 5.

³² Raphael Littauer and Norman Uphoff, ed., *The Air War in Indochina* (Boston, MA: Bacon Press, Cornell University, 1972), 173-174 and Carl Berger, ed., *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia, 1961-1973* (Washington D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1977), 9. Various sources credit the VNAF with either/both of the A-1 and F-8F assets. The important detail to note is both attack aircraft were World War II vintage whose condition was poor based on lack of maintenance, and the VNAF possessed less than seventy aircraft overall (Project CHECO, Part IV, *Command Structure/Relationships Oct 61-Dec 63*, Southeast Asia Report Oct 61-Dec 63.)

elementary and certainly unable to accept an increased tempo of operations. PACAF assessed the SVN command and control for air operations as virtually non-existent and that the, “Vietnamese cannot provide it.”³³ Another wrinkle in the air-ground issue was that each province employed its own cadre of four to six forward air controllers.³⁴ Although their permanent assignment to the province, allowed the controllers to become very familiar with the local geography and terrain, they were poorly trained and had very little autonomy to control operations. Additionally, they needed to have a solid friendship with the province chief since any air strike needed to be approved by the province chief and the associated corps commander.

Factors Affecting the Role of Air Advisors

National Politics

The command link not addressed earlier was the US civilian element of control in 1961, that of the US Ambassador to South Vietnam, Ambassador Nolting. As the head of the US military forces in South Vietnam, the Chief of the MAAG needed to make the ambassador aware of any changes in diplomatic or military policy in Vietnam. However, the initial concept of deploying the 2nd ADVON was either misidentified or misinterpreted as a new military headquarters being set up without consulting Ambassador Nolting. The immediate reaction was a firestorm of message traffic to

³³ General Emmett O'Donnell, Jr., Commander in Chief, Pacific Air Forces, memorandum to Commander in Chief, Pacific, subject: Proposal for Tactical Air Control System, 13 November 1961 (included in Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report Part V-A, Supporting Documents, October 1961-December 1963.)

³⁴ Lane, 86.

verify and explain the mission, intent and command lines for the 2nd ADVON.³⁵ Perhaps because of this rocky start for the operation, the Ambassador declined to permit full-up operations initially. He directed that no “Jungle Jim” combat missions could be flown unless authorized by him.³⁶ Obviously, introduction of combat forces/command structures was a political issue that could have implications beyond the battlefield.

This same negative sentiment towards US force in South Vietnam surfaced later as the war progressed and FARMGATE operations increased and expanded in scope. In a joint Department of State/Defense message, both Secretaries expressed concern to the Ambassador and USMACV about the emphasis of air activities in Vietnam in the US press. Details of a strike made on 8 February 1963 attracted attention with possible deaths of non-combatants.³⁷ The presence and application of airpower to solve a tactical military problem became a strategic political issue. Regardless of how the force

³⁵ Ambassador Nolting found it “incomprehensible that new U.S. military headquarters would be established in this country without consultation with [him] or with the government of Vietnam.” He further went on to postpone the establishment of the 2nd ADVON until 1) the State Department concurred with activation, 2) exact details of the command relationship were explained to all parties, and 3) the Government of Vietnam concurred with establishment of such. Specifically concerning operations, the ambassador sent, “...I would in particular wish precise understanding that any combat or quasi-combat operations in Viet-Nam carried by elements of this command be cleared in advance with me.” (Message, 251012Z NOV 61, Ambassador Nolting, to CINCPAC, 25 November 1961 included in Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, Vol IV, Part A.)

³⁶ History, CINCPAC, 1961, 188.

³⁷ The initial joint message concluded, “As you know, for some time the State Department has had reservations about the net value of air operations in Vietnam, info furnished by you will be used to support AF position on this subject as required.” (information quoted in Message, 112129Z NOV 63, Chief Staff of the Air Force to Commander, Pacific Air Forces, 21 November 1963.) Earlier guidance from the State Department placed border restrictions on US air operations, hoping to avoid the above type situation. Stating that the “...political significance at present...certainly outweighs probable military advantage of air operations in border area...”, Secretary of State Rusk went on to say, “Politically, the count against us now two and three-quarters strikes. Militarily, there is general agreement that success lies not in drawing tight cordon sanitaire in Maginot manner along vaguely defined frontier...”, to highlight the political risk of overextending airpower’s limits in the counterinsurgency (Message, 082205Z DEC 62, Secretary of State, to Ambassador, American Embassy, Saigon, 8 December 1962.) Both messages included in Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, Part III-A, Supporting Documents October 1961-December 1963.

application aspect of airpower was perceived, the ambassador approved of the psychological warfare ability of airpower and recommended its “more widespread use.”³⁸

The Republic of Vietnam viewed its air assets as both a capability and as an internal threat. Because of the nature of the insurgency, political lines were also drawn in the military, though sometimes in the shadows. The ground forces required logistics and time to move and they fell under the control of the corps and division commanders. As such, they were not seen as rapidly mobilized threats. The air forces, however, were not bound by the same logistical tether and could strike South Vietnamese targets if commanded or operated by personnel opposed to the government. In fact, this occurred in February of 1962 with an attack on the palace.³⁹ Because of the perceived potential internal threat posed by the air force, the VNAF was not accorded the same trust, and therefore not given the same priority for operations as the ground forces.

US Inter-Service Competition

The TAC commander, General W.C. Sweeney, was concerned with what he considered a lack of coordination in South Vietnam between air and ground forces. He believed “airpower’s voice was too small” and so informed USAF Chief of Staff, General Curtis LeMay.⁴⁰ Concurrently, General O’Donnell, PACAF commander, recommended the USAF increase the forces in the FARMGATE detachment. Both commanders felt

³⁸ Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, Part V, Air Operations October 1961-December 1963, 84.

³⁹ Anthis interview, 30 August 1963. This attack was staged by two Vietnamese pilots who diverted the AD-6s from a planned strike in the delta and instead targeted President Diem’s palace. (Robert F. Futrell, *The United States Air Force in Southeast Asia, The Advisory Years to 1965* (Washington D.C.: Office of Air Force History, 1981), 129.)

⁴⁰ History, Tactical Air Command, 1 July-31 December 1962, 24-25.

that US Army aviation, which also began arriving in 1961, was encroaching on the combat aviation mission of the US Air Force.⁴¹

These competitive feelings surfaced frequently and were addressed as an item of concern by members of a staff assistance visit as late as 1964. The fear was that the air officers were being “squeezed out” of air operations planning and execution. The problem lay in the Air Liaison Officer’s (ALO) inability to commit assets during combat planning conferences:

The ALOs lack bargaining power at the planning conference because he has no USAF or VNAF aircraft that he can definitely commit without approval of higher authority. This contrasts with the senior U.S. Army Advisor at Corps and Division level, who often possesses permanently allocated Army aviation which he can offer, commit, withdraw, and control according to his participation in the planning. Inevitably, some requests for air assistance fall directly to the Army aviation element because of the timeliness of the response. The poorer response of the VNAF/USAF aircraft in terms of time is not an inherent weakness of airpower, but reflects the ARVN command channels and communications problems existing in Vietnam. The armed Army aviation is not subject to the same restrictions on rules of engagement that have been imposed by 2nd Air Division and which may have outlived their usefulness.⁴²

⁴¹ History, Tactical Air Command, 1 July-31 December 1962, 5-7. The Air Force and the Army at this time had just been through an intensive re-examination of organic aviation requirements. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara directed the Army to examine just this issue and the United States Army Tactical Mobility Requirements Board (the “Howze Board”, for its board chief, Lt Gen Hamilton H. Howze, Commanding General XVIII Airborne Corps) conducted many weeks of investigation into the role of tactical airpower. Many in the Air Force believed the Army was attempting to gain control of air assets, command and control, and the mission of close air support (to include air superiority) in support of ground operations.

⁴² Franklin, 7.

To further complicate matters, US Army aviation allocated to the corps was available to individual ground commanders for unilateral employment. In addition, most US Army aviation activities were not coordinated with the Tactical Air Control System.⁴³ In effect, the US Army airpower in the form of their armed helicopters operated independently from central control and without the hindrance of the ROE.

Cultural Factors

Many US personnel did not develop the feeling of “belonging to an organization” in South Vietnam because they were scheduled for short-duty rotation on temporary duty (TDY) to support combat operations.⁴⁴ Because of this, TDY personnel would send operational data to their “home” units before it had been collated with other “in country” operational information. This reduced its effectiveness because it was not processed through the correct channels. Along with the lack of sense of belonging, the somewhat covert nature of the operation meant that personnel could not share the results or their operations, nor did they have a good sense of where they “fit” in the grand scheme of things.⁴⁵

The short TDY rotation cycle also hampered development of good working relationships between US-VNAF counterparts. Just about the time Vietnamese would learn to respect and trust the US airmen, they would leave at the end of their TDY tour, which forced the Vietnamese to adjust to another person. In contrast, the Vietnamese

⁴³ Air Force Test Unit, Vietnam, Discussion of MACV Directives Relating to Control and Coordination of Air, staff study, November 1963, and Tactical Evaluation Directorate, CHECO Division, HQ PACAF, Control of Air Strikes in SEA 1961-1966, Project CHECO Report, 1 March 1967.

⁴⁴ Maj Gen Rollen H. Anthis, transcript of oral history interview by Maj S.E. Riddlebarger and LTC V. Castellina, November 1969, 6-7, US Air Force Historical Research Agency, Maxwell Air Force Base, AL. Maj Gen Anthis was the initial commander for the 2nd ADVON (later 2nd Air Division) until January 1964. Many personnel were rotated on a TDY support basis on a 30-, 60-, or 90-day rotation policy.

pilots knew only war. Though they may have been deficient in some regards with respect to equipment and training, the VNAF fought the war day in and day out, with no end in sight. This difference in mental approach to the war created a barrier for US airmen, and sometimes meant that they received information concerning the war only when they had “proved” themselves committed to supporting South Vietnam.

Not only did short tours make establishing good working relationships difficult, US pilots did not gain enough experience and familiarity with the terrain, geography and the threats to become fully effective in combat.⁴⁵ The longer the pilot had to acquaint himself with the environment, the more capable he became in distinguishing enemy movements and developing the sense of situational awareness necessary to respond to the dynamics of combat.

Command, Control and Operations

Tasking Air Assets

When FARMGATE operators initially integrated into the VNAF air control system, they faced a vestige of former French operations in the country. For pre-planned requests for air support, the divisions initiated a request to the corps-level Tactical Operations Center (TOC.) Typically, a junior, inexperienced ALO would attempt to validate the request. If approved, the request would be routed to the Joint General Staff (JGS) in Saigon. JGS personnel (not necessarily air force) would determine validity and assets available, and if approved, would send the tasking to the appropriate Air Operations

⁴⁵ Anthis interview, November 1969, 16.

⁴⁶ Briefing, Secretary of Defense Book, Items for Discussion with the Secretary of Defense, CINCPAC, 15 January 1962.

Center (AOC.) The AOC then executed the mission and the JGS would inform the Corps of the approved mission.⁴⁷

To upgrade the process, the Air Force installed a Joint Operations Center (JOC.) The JOC was meant to be the hub of Air Force planning operations, which was the core of the Tactical Air Control System (TACS.)⁴⁸ However, lack of VNAF participation in the Joint Operations Center caused deficiencies in the overall operation of the TACS. The JOC had a VNAF director, who was rarely present due to other duties, and a USAF deputy director. Another hindrance to planning was that the VNAF Chief of Combat Plans Division took no active part in conducting the operational planning of the division. USAF Strike Plans Officers accomplished the actual detailed planning.⁴⁹ The VNAF preferred to place their air assets on ground alert status, thereby negating the need to accomplish pre-strike mission planning. This failed to satisfy USAF criteria for providing the right air support for the particular operation., i.e., getting the right aircraft with the right ordnance over the correct location at the correct time.

The coordinating product of the JOC was the Air Fragmentary Order (“frag order”). The frag order was designed to task both US and VNAF operations by detailing mission information, unit and aircraft tasked, and provide coordinating instructions. The frag order was used as a directive in the FARMGATE operation, but the frag order was in

⁴⁷ Momyer, 10.

⁴⁸ The Joint Operations Center was renamed the Joint Air Operations Center, the Air Operations Center and finally in 1965 the Tactical Air Control Center. Reference to any of these terms represents the same facility and function. The Tactical Air Control System was the entire network of Combat Reporting Centers (CRCs), Air Support Operations Centers (ASOCs), Air Liaison Officers (ALOs) and Forward Air Controllers (FACs) which, combined, attempted to plan, coordinate and control USAF and VNAF air operations (Lane, 73.)

⁴⁹ Lt Col Charles D. Easley, Deputy Director, 2nd Joint Operations Center, memorandum to Col Anderson, Deputy Commander 2nd ADVON (2nd Air Division), subject: Deficiencies in the Tactical Air Control System, 1 July 1962 (included in History, Second Air Division, 15 November 1961-8 October 1962, Vol III (Supporting Documents), 123.

English and connectivity to Vietnamese through secure teletype circuits was not convenient. Therefore, the frag order was sent “in the clear” (transmitted via non-secure means) to VNAF facilities, with the probability that they were keeping the Vietcong (VC) informed of air operations.⁵⁰ Adding to an already frustrating situation for the US planning cell, the VNAF officers and enlisted personnel adhered to the tradition of enjoying a three-hour siesta in the mid-day. Halting work during this time of peak operations planning affected planning and training of VNAF personnel.⁵¹

Finally, in the early 1960s, the Vietnamese hamlets and villages were not a very cohesive group. One village might not know who the chief of the next village was. Yet, aircraft on call had to get permission from the province chief before any strikes or attacks were made.⁵² Even when a hamlet or village wanted to request air support, those requests usually had to be made by telephone. In addition, the JOC did not centrally control all tactical airpower in South Vietnam (SVN.) The preponderance of tactical aircraft fell under the control of VNAF Headquarters. This limited the real-time effort of the JOC to act in its stated capacity as the “operations center”—such as diverting airborne FAC missions to adjacent areas to control strikes generated by other means.⁵³

Mission Planning and Targeting Guidance

Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) participation in the JOC was ineffective. Field commanders and corps representatives did not have up-to-date information on

⁵⁰ Ibid, 124.

⁵¹ Ibid, 126.

⁵² Lt Gen Joseph H. Moore, transcript of oral history interview by Major Samuel E. Riddleberger and Lt Col Valentino Castellina, 22 Nov 1969, 7, US Air Force Historical Research Agency, Maxwell AFB, AL. Lt Gen Moore held the position of Commander, 2nd Air Division and Deputy COMUSMACV for Air, January 1964-July 1966.

⁵³ Easley, 123-126.

ground operations nor did they have the authority to make decisions. However, their input was needed to accurately prioritize and apportion air support. To transmit needed information, the ARVN representative used non-secure phone lines to contact headquarters on urgent matters. This activity consumed valuable time in the planning process and exposed operations to security violations.⁵⁴

Finding lucrative Viet Cong lines of communication targets was not easy. Maj Gen Anthis, 2nd ADVON commander described the difficulty in identifying targets:

“The roads there, for example, and the bridges—the roads were paths through the jungle, and they’re pretty hard to see from the air; as a matter of fact, in many cases, almost impossible to see from the air. And their bridges were either vine or rope that’s been slung across a river or a creek, or it could be a log across the river; or it could be just a regular old ford where they walk across a shallow place across the river. Their railroads were, in many cases, the big buffalo, the elephants, things of this nature which they could carry their large pieces on.”⁵⁵

Combat Intelligence

One of the most “serious drawbacks” to effective employment of airpower in South Vietnam was the lack of a national intelligence system to provide timely target information. Though the Tactical Air Control System (TACS) attempted to disseminate target information to various command levels for rapid decision-making, the VNAF did not possess the intelligence function or infrastructure to support real-time air operations. Their maps and charts were inaccurate, intelligence data collection capability was

⁵⁴ Ibid, 123-126.

⁵⁵ Anthis interview, November 1969, 28.

unavailable, and intelligence exploitation, such as photographic reconnaissance interpretation, was virtually non-existent.⁵⁶

Nonetheless, the Air Force depended greatly on their Vietnamese counterparts to provide intelligence concerning the Viet Cong. Much of it was gained from defectors or peasants who had been mistreated by the Viet Cong. Additional information came from those groups that supported the South Vietnamese government. Americans, few of whom spoke Vietnamese, had great difficulty in obtaining grass roots information. Even when the South Vietnamese offered intelligence, US planners could never be sure of its reliability or accuracy.

Other Significant Issues

Rules of Engagement

Other than prohibiting overflights of other countries, the VNAF had no Rules of Engagement (ROE.) Therefore, the USAF not only established their own, but recommended ROE for the Vietnamese JGS to consider.⁵⁷ The ROE for the USAF in South Vietnam were very restrictive, and necessarily so, for two reasons: 1) it was difficult to distinguish between the enemy troops and friendly non-combatants, and 2) US leadership, both military and civilian, did not want this to be an American war. To help reduce the problem of target misidentification and provide legitimacy to US air

⁵⁶ Secretary of Defense briefing, 15 January 1962.

⁵⁷ Message, 230432Z, JAN 62 Commander in Chief, Pacific to Chief, Military Assistance Advisory Group, Vietnam, 23 January 1962 (included in Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, Part V-A, Supporting Documents, October 1961-December 1963) The SVN JGS approved the recommended ROE in April 1962.

operations, early ROE mandated that a qualified Vietnamese observer be on-board combat and combat-support flights.⁵⁸

The only case where an American could direct USAF air strikes was the case where US Army Special Forces established a target and received Vietnamese government representative approval. In this case, aircraft were scrambled and under the control of the US Special Forces controller on the ground (the target was still authenticated by the Vietnamese representative.)⁵⁹

Both the USAF and VNAF pilots considered the requirement for a Vietnamese observer as unsatisfactory and detrimental to the mission. The VNAF pilots did not like the duty, and thus non-qualified VNAF enlisted airmen, who sometimes became violently ill in flight, often filled the role.⁶⁰ Requiring a VNAF pilot to accompany an USAF pilot in the backseat during a T-28 attack mission also reduced the availability of VNAF pilots for training in the front seat, one of the primary functions of FARMGATE.

Training

The VNAF pilots were competent day, attack pilots and more VNAF pilots were needed to fill the cockpits of the increasing numbers of US-supplied aircraft. The “Dirty

⁵⁸ Message, 202238Z DEC 61, Commander in Chief, Pacific to Chief, Military Assistance Advisory Group, Vietnam, 20 December 1961 (included in Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, Part V-A, Supporting Documents, October 1961-December 1963.) This message seemed to put the last nail in the coffin on the issue of having a qualified SVN observer in the aircraft. The requirement for VNAF observer did not reach 2nd ADVON until the first FARMGATE attack mission was airborne...without VNAF observers (Anthis interview, 30 August 1963.) Interestingly, official guidance from US Military Assistance Command-Vietnam on this issue was not published until November 1962 (USMACV Directive Number 62, Operational Restrictions on U.S. Aircraft in South Vietnam, 24 November 1962 (included in Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, Part V-A, Supporting Documents, October 1961-December 1963.))

⁵⁹ Doyle, 194.

⁶⁰ Commander Det 2 Alpha, memorandum to Commander, 2nd ADVON, subject: Monthly Report on Development of Tactics and Techniques, 5 June 1962. In order to make sure the VNAF observers would be available for missions, 2nd ADVON requested and received approval to feed SVN personnel in US mess

Thirties” made some of the greatest contributions to supplying more pilots. Thirty C-47 pilots flew with the VNAF squadrons, which allowed 30 VNAF pilots to train in the fighter (T-28) program. One of the benefits of this program was that the VNAF C-47 squadrons produced visible gains in tactics and procedures by flying with the US pilots. The US pilots were able to make this happen because they lived, ate and worked with their VNAF counterparts. The other benefit was freeing up VNAF pilots to train in fighters. The operational tempo made it difficult to devote any time or sorties to training the VNAF pilots. With the personnel exchange, VNAF pilots could pursue training in more advanced attack aircraft and procedures.⁶¹

Although the VNAF pilots were competent in day operations, they did not employ or train for night operations. Fortunately, one of the loopholes that the US ROE left open for US-only operations was the guidance that missions using US personnel/aircraft could be undertaken if the capability of the VNAF was lacking, either because of training or equipment.⁶² To fill this tactical void, the Americans proceeded at their own pace in night attack operations because the VNAF was not trained or equipped for these missions.⁶³

Equipment

The Vietnamese had deplorable maintenance, which concern over possible serious maintenance deficiencies if additional aircraft were delivered and their flying hour

halls to make them stay around. Though many VNAF personnel did not like to sandbag (sit as observers in the aircraft), they at least received a good meal for their troubles (Anthis interview, 30 August 1963, 19.)

⁶¹ Anthis interview, 30 August 1963, 20.

⁶² USMACV Directive Number 62.

⁶³ For extensive accounting of development and effectiveness of night operations in South Vietnam, see Major Victor B. Anthony, USAF, *The Air Force in Southeast Asia, Tactics and Techniques of Night*

program accelerated.⁶⁴ This same trend was exhibited with radios installed by the United States Operations Mission to facilitate air requests. Of the 1500 radios installed, approximately 40 percent were inoperable due to poor upkeep.⁶⁵

Hamlets throughout South Vietnam did not have radios to communicate directly with friendly fire support aircraft. To compensate for this deficiency, the hamlets devised innovative methods to direct close air support at night. Hamlets would have a large moveable arrow on the ground. When a hamlet came under attack by Viet Cong, villagers would put lighted cans of oil on the arrow so that it could be seen from the air once the supporting aircraft flew into the area. The direction of the arrow indicated the direction from which the Viet Cong attack was originating. The friendly attack aircraft would then drop flares over the approximate position and attack the Viet Cong when they were sighted.⁶⁶

Lack of communications also affected attempts to support ground convoys. Often the ground convoys or ground forces did not have radios to contact strike escort aircraft. Additionally, USAF and US Army communication systems operated on mismatched frequency spectrums. US Army helicopters attempting to rendezvous with ground personnel often did not communicate with the strike aircraft at all, or if they did, it was after the rendezvous was complete. This mismatch was complicated even further by different types of strike aircraft having different communication equipment.⁶⁷

Operations 1961-1970 (Washington D.C.: Officer of Air Force History, 1973) and Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, Part V, Air Operations, October 1961-December 1963.

⁶⁴ Secretary of Defense briefing, 15 January 1962.

⁶⁵ Gurfield, Air Request System, 9.

⁶⁶ Anthis interview, November 1969, 29.

⁶⁷ Commander, Det 2 Alpha, memorandum to Commander, 2nd ADVON, subject: Monthly Report on Development of Tactics and Techniques, 6 November 1962. A contributing factor to mismatched

FARMGATE Counterinsurgency Operations: Lessons Learned

The FARMGATE detachment faced incredible challenges when they touched down and helped to combat a foreign insurgency. US Air Force personnel struggled with the high-level problems of competing for control of air assets with the US Army, and gained the trust of both the South Vietnamese President and the US Ambassador while defining the lines of command for the organization. FARMGATE airmen also helped install and validate a Tactical Air Control System and developed a Joint Operations Center that facilitated the combat planning process. This required an influx of personnel and equipment to build and maintain the radar sites, communications network and intelligence centers necessary to provide support to the TACCS and JOC.

Another task was improving South Vietnam's Air Force through pilot training and upgrading maintenance procedures. To accomplish this, personnel faced barriers such as language and culture. Additionally, lack of continuity caused by the personnel rotation policy forced a new beginning in building relationships every few months. US Air Force pilots were mentally torn between wanting to "get into the action" to prosecute the war themselves and providing a solid training base to the South Vietnamese.

As they prosecuted the war alongside their South Vietnamese counterparts, US airmen wrestled with marginal intelligence, communications equipment problems, and identifying friend from enemy. Even with sound intelligence concerning the locations of

communications capabilities stems from initial installation of the civilian communications network to unite the hamlets into village, district and province headquarters. The United States Operations Mission specifically selected communications equipment that de-conflicted with military communications system. The reasoning was the installation of six thousand additional radios would overload the frequency spectrum already in use. Unfortunately, this meant these communications systems were not directly available to request or contact emergency military assistance (Gurfield, Air Request System, 7.)

Viet Cong units, once aircraft were over the target, even the South Vietnamese observers had trouble distinguishing insurgents from innocent civilians.

Along with other military operations, between 1961-1964 FARMGATE accomplished much to keep South Vietnam from falling to the insurgents. The experience a good deal of information on tactics, munitions performance and counterinsurgency operations. After three years, a second FARMGATE-like squadron stood up to assist in performing the same mission.⁶⁸ Fortunately, they benefited from the lessons learned and accomplishments of the first squadron. However, their entrance into the war only continued to make it more of an “American” war and less of a “South Vietnamese” war.

⁶⁸ Designated the 602nd Fighter Commando Squadron, activated October 1964 (Futrell, 272.)

Chapter 3

El Salvador Insurgency: 1981-1992

U.S. policy toward El Salvador represents an attempt to formulate a new approach to a painfully familiar problem. The essence of that approach has been to provide a besieged ally with weapons, ammunition, and other equipment, economic aid, intelligence support, strategic counsel, and tactical training—while preserving the principle that the war remains ultimately *theirs* to win or lose.

—A. J. Bacevich, et. al.

American Military Policy in Small Wars:

The Case of El Salvador

Origins of Conflict

El Salvador, about one-eighth the size of Vietnam, rests in America's strategic front-yard in Central America. In the 1960s El Salvador was a country dominated by the "fourteen families", an elite landed oligarchy, which coupled with high population density, resulted in social unrest manifested in an outflow of Salvadoran refugees to Honduras.⁶⁹ Fearing Salvadoran attempts to annex the southern portion of Honduras where the refugees resided, the Honduras government ordered the expulsion of the Salvadoran immigrants, which led to the "Soccer War" of 1969.

⁶⁹ Martin C. Needler, "El Salvador: The Military and Politics", *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 17, No. 4, Summer 1991, 570-573. Dr. Needler was the dean of the School of International Studies.

Refugees forced back into El Salvador caused land shortages, high unemployment, and widespread dissatisfaction which, in turn, led to vigilante death-squad activity by the Salvadoran security forces to quell the unrest. This in turn galvanized civilian-based protection groups, which eventually united into the Farabundo Marti de Liberation Front (FMLN).⁷⁰ The FMLN then became the lead group to organize and execute the guerrilla operations of the insurgents.

The “official” birth of the Salvadoran civil war of the 1980’s began with a military coup in 1979. The coup installed a military-civilian junta led by Lieutenant Colonel Adolfo Majono.⁷¹ This first junta was ineffectual in reforming the elitist status quo. The fourteen families, supported by the army and security forces, countered attempts at social reform, improving human rights or bringing death squad leaders to justice. Majono’s inability to bring about change only strengthened the position of the rebels with the population. A second junta, whose civilian element was led by the Christian Democratic party, botched an attempt at land reform in 1980, again exacerbating the social unrest and reinforcing popular support for the FMLN.⁷²

⁷⁰ For review of FMLN composition see Needler, 583-585 and Jose Angel Moroni Bracamonte and David E. Spencer, *Strategy and Tactics of the Salvadoran FMLN Guerrillas* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995.)

⁷¹ Thomas P. Anderson, *Politics in Central America* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1982), 74-76.

⁷² Approximately twenty-five percent of arable land was to be seized and redistributed in lots of no more than 245 acres. Facing attempted land seizures by armed peasants, the junta mismanaged the operation and Salvadoran security forces took over the administration of the land reform. These forces gave much of the land to the military and paramilitary members (Needler, 575.)

Overview of Operations

US Involvement

Concurrent with operations in El Salvador, US Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) remained abreast of other subversive operations and insurgencies in over half the countries in its area of responsibility. This meant the eyes of other Latin American countries were on the US as it provided support to the Salvadoran government. General Jack Galvin, SOUTHCOM Commander in Chief, perceived it was vitally important for the US to wear the “white hat” as it assisted El Salvador.⁷³ He understood that public opinion wielded considerable influence both in the US Congress and with the Latin American partners, and was determined to provide the professional interface to improve Salvadoran capability to fight the war, and avoid turning the conflict into an American war.

To assist El Salvador in its effort, President Duarte requested and received American support in the form of financing, military assets and trainers.⁷⁴ Duarte, in conjunction with US country team, aimed to keep this war under Salvadoran control and limit the amount of US influence. Thus, in 1981 the US placed a limit of 55 trainers that could operate in El Salvador at any given time.⁷⁵ In addition, US personnel could not participate in combat operations or train below the brigade level within El Salvador. Though this restriction never clearly defined limitations for air operations training, US

⁷³ General John R. Galvin, USA, Commander-in-Chief, US Southern Command, in *Armed Forces Journal International*, December 1985, 36. General Galvin was CINCSOUTHCOM from 1983 to 1986.

⁷⁴ Senate, *The Situation in El Salvador: Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations*, 97th Cong., 1st sess., 18 March and 9 April 1981, 55.

⁷⁵ Jose Napoleon Duarte, *My Story* (New York, NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1986), 171. Duarte maintains the decision to limit the number of trainers to fifty-five was based on discussions between himself and US Ambassador White in 1981.

Air Force trainers were not allowed to fly missions with or physically put “hands on” Salvadoran combat equipment.⁷⁶

The US remained within the restriction of “no more than 55 U.S. trainers in El Salvador” only if one overlooked how the 55 were counted. As an example, in 1984 11-16 members worked at the Military Group at the U.S. embassy, 20-25 medical trainers operated throughout El Salvador, private U.S. contract personnel provided maintenance on U.S.-supplied aircraft and at least 26 members served on the staff of the Defense Attaches office. The 55-person cap on trainers excluded all of these individuals. Depending on the number of TDY personnel serving in these excluded positions, the population of US military numbered up to 100 personnel.⁷⁷ In addition, over 1000 US military members were stationed in Honduras flying reconnaissance missions and training Salvadoran soldiers at the Regional Military Training Center (CREM, its Spanish acronym.)⁷⁸

Salvadoran Military Strategy

El Salvador pursued three separate strategies to defeat the FMLN. From 1981 to 1983, the government concentrated on building up its conventional ground and air forces. In 1981 the junta requested a US assessment of the Salvadoran armed forces and at the direction of the US Joint Chiefs, Brigadier General Fred Woerner conducted an in-depth

⁷⁶ Dr. John D. Waghelstein, Professor in Operations Department, US Naval War College, Newport, RI, interviewed by author, 31 March 1999. Dr. Waghelstein is a retired US Army Colonel who served seven tours in or in support of SOUTHCOM. He served as the Military Group Commander, El Salvador, from 1982-1983. Also, in October 1983, three “trainers” were relieved of duty for traveling by helicopter over a combat zone. (Leach, 231.)

⁷⁷ Waghelstein, interview.

⁷⁸ Representative Jim Leach et. al., “The Escalation of the Air War: A Congressional View”, *El Salvador: Central America in the Cold War*, eds. Marvin E. Gettleman et. al. (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1986), 230-231.

survey of the Salvadoran military and produced a report outlining the support and force structure required to combat the insurgency.⁷⁹ In his report, General Woerner presented three options predicated on increased US assistance: avoid defeat, gain and maintain the initiative, and destroy the insurgents' will and capability to fight.⁸⁰ Based on recommendations of the Woerner Report, and with considerable US aid, El Salvador nearly tripled the size of its armed forces and increased military training both inside and outside the country.

After significant expansion, in 1983 the Salvadoran Army initiated a program known as the National Campaign Plan.⁸¹ Under this plan, the Army aimed to clear and hold rebel-dominated territory, thereby giving the local populace an umbrella of security. The Army hoped to then initiate civic action in the held territory to win the support of the people. Unfortunately, the rebels refused to engage and instead employed guerrilla tactics to inflict substantial casualties on the Army. In the words of US Ambassador to El Salvador, Thomas Pickering, the Army had, "not shown the capacity to deal with the counteroffensive and the intent of the plan."⁸²

Under the next plan, the "Unidos Para Reconstuir" (UPR), President Duarte, the Defense Minister and Army Chief of staff agreed in March 1986 to create the National

⁷⁹ Colonel John D. Waghelstein, *El Salvador: Observations and Experiences in Counterinsurgency*, DTIC Technical Report AD-B091 068 (Alexandria, VA: Defense Technical Information Agency, 1 January 1985), 36.

⁸⁰ Brigadier General Fred E. Woerner, *Report of the El Salvador Military Strategy Assistance Team (Draft)* (Washington, D.C.: National Security Archive, 12 Sep-8 Nov 1981), 24-25. General Woerner's report was a comprehensive look at El Salvador and addressed not only military improvement issues, but civil/political and population issues as well. Although many sections of the report are still classified, the unclassified sections are refreshingly frank in their assessment and identified many of the endemic social problems that plagued the Salvadoran military.

⁸¹ Leach, 231.

⁸² As quoted in Leach, 232.

Joint Coordination Committee.⁸³ This agreement established a chain of command from the fourteen national departments to the Army Chief of Staff and attempted to unite military and civilian activities in a coordinate counterinsurgency war campaign. As part of the new military strategy under the UPR, the Army reverted to more conventional “sweep” operations to seek out and destroy the rebels. In addition, the FAS increased the intensity of aerial bombardment in the five northeastern departments where the rebels were most active. The stepped-up air war had two objectives: to disrupt the insurgents’ ability to conduct mass attacks and to drive civilians out of the areas controlled by the rebels, hoping to deny the rebels a base of logistical support.⁸⁴ The Salvadoran military continued these types of operations well into the late 1980s, eventually culminating in a strategic stalemate with the insurgents in 1989.

Analysis of Operations

US Armed Forces

All of the US military trainers serving in El Salvador reported administratively to the US Military Group. However, since there was no US combat or combat support infrastructure, the military members were farmed out to their respective service functions for training duties. For the US Air Force, this meant only five personnel assisted the FAS in the capacity of maintenance officers or instructor pilots. In 1983 a snapshot of the

⁸³ Phillip J. Williams and Knut Walter, *Militarization and Demilitarization in El Salvador’s Transition to Democracy* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), 119 and Richard Duncan Downie, *Learning From Conflict: The US Military in Vietnam, El Salvador, and the Drug War* (Westport, CT: 1998), 141.

⁸⁴ Leach, 232. Between July 1983 and February 1984, the number A-37 hours flown increased by 68 percent a month and UH-1 flight hours increased by 60 percent per month.

USAF trainers in country revealed an Air Force Section Chief and a combination of four maintenance technicians and instructor pilots.⁸⁵

The USAF trainers provided technical advice on maintenance and training procedures. Additionally, they could provide limited operational and tactical military advice, but they could not physically perform functional procedures on Salvadoran equipment.⁸⁶ This restriction prohibited USAF maintenance technicians from working on aircraft or loading armament, and prohibited pilots from flying with Salvadorans on combat or combat support missions.

Salvadoran Army

There were six Salvadoran brigade commanders and each controlled military operations in a military zone. Each military zone contained one or more of the fourteen civil government departments (department is similar to a province) and each was controlled by a department commander. Because of the high degree of centralized control in the Salvadoran Armed Forces, the departmental commanders operated “quasi-independently”, conducting operations within their zone.⁸⁷ Enlisted men were forced into service, press-ganged off the street and made to serve in the various security forces or army.⁸⁸ The officer corps represented the social elite and trained at the military academy before commissioning. El Salvador also operated the Salvadoran National Guard, the National Police and the Treasury Police. These three organizations, adequate for

⁸⁵ Waghelstein, *Observations and Experiences*, Appendix F, F-1.

⁸⁶ Jerry Klingaman, Director of Tactics and Plans, 6th Special Operations Squadron, Hurlburt AFB, FL, interviewed by author, 31 March 1999. Mr. Klingaman is a retired USAF Lt Col whose previous assignments include Professor of Regional Warfare Studies at USAF Air War College and Senior Research Fellow at CADRE (College for Aerospace Doctrine, Research, and Education.)

⁸⁷ Waghelstein, *Observations and Experiences*, 37.

⁸⁸ Duarte, 194.

maintaining peacetime order, operated on a paramilitary basis with no cohesive command structure and were not suited to wartime operations.⁸⁹

Salvadoran Air Force

El Salvador first saw air combat in the when one of its pilots flew a Wright Flyer during the civil war in Mexico in 1917.⁹⁰ Supplied primarily by the United States, the Salvadoran Air Force (FAS) flew primarily World War II combat aircraft during the 1969 “Soccer War” with Honduras.⁹¹ Aircraft such as the Israeli (originally French) Ouragan fighter-bombers, of 1950s vintage eventually replaced their inventory of World War II aircraft. By 1979, the FAS had approximately 20 obsolete helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft. As a result of continued imports and US upgrades the FAS grew to over 135 aircraft in 1988.⁹² The US supplied A-37s for fighter-bomber operations, O-2As for armed FAC and reconnaissance operations, and AC-47s for gunship operations.⁹³ In addition, UH-1s and Hughes 500 helicopters provided additional attack and reconnaissance capability as well as troop transport.⁹⁴ The FAS also operated their own

⁸⁹ Waghelstein, *Observations and Experiences*, 39.

⁹⁰ Daniel P. Hagedorn, *Central American and Caribbean Air Forces* (Kent, Great Britain: Air-Britain (Historians) Ltd., 1993), 79.

⁹¹ Hagedorn, 88-89. FAS front-line fighter and attack aircraft consisted of F-51s, T34s, and B-26s.

⁹² A.J. Bacevich et. al., *American Military Policy in Small Wars: The Case of El Salvador* (Washington, D.C.: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1988), 32.

⁹³ The “Ouragan” was a single-engine ground attack jet fighter; the A-37 was a twin-engine, modified jet trainer capable of airstrikes and forward air control and observation; the O-2 was a single-engine, propeller observation aircraft with limited rocket capability; the AC-47 was a modified C-47 with side-firing capability (Hagedorn, 91-95.)

⁹⁴ Barton Meyers, “Defense Against Aerial Attack in El Salvador”, *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, Vol. 22, No. 2, Winter 1994, 329. The UH-1H variant served principally as the troop carrier while the UH-1M and Hughes 500 accomplished the helicopter attack missions.

paratroop battalion and performed assault operations independent from Army ground missions.⁹⁵

Factors Affecting US Training Mission

Salvadoran National Politics

After the 1979 coup, a civilian-military junta ran the Salvadoran government until 1982 when an assembly was elected. In 1984, Salvadorans elected Jose Napoleon Duarte as their president in the first free elections in over a decade.⁹⁶ However, because of the historical role the military played in ruling El Salvador, the government exercised “no effective control over the decisions of the Salvadoran military”.⁹⁷ The autonomy of the military made it practically impossible to punish corrupt military officers.⁹⁸ There was no formal system of punishment for members of the Salvadoran Armed Forces. Since the legal system in El Salvador was virtually non-existent, most military criminals received no punishment at worst, and at best, were relocated to lucrative civil posts. As an example, after the 1979 coup, over 100 officers were forcibly retired because of abuses of authority. By 1982, as many as sixty of them were reinstated in military positions. One of the worst offending colonels was removed and later named head of telecommunications in El Salvador.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Klingaman, interview. This paratroop battalion was a Salvadoran Army unit placed under the command of a FAS major.

⁹⁶ Prior to the election, President Duarte served on the junta as the Christian Democratic Party representative. In the four years he served as president, Duarte is credited with instituting social reforms and working to overhaul the corrupt Salvadoran Armed Forces.

⁹⁷ Senate, Report to the Committee on Foreign Relations and Committee on Appropriations, *El Salvador: The United States in the Midst of a Maelstrom*, 97th Cong., 2nd sess., March 1982, 6.

⁹⁸ Williams and Walter, 139 & 148.

⁹⁹ Senate, *El Salvador: The United States in the Midst of a Maelstrom*, 6.

This lack of civilian control over and lack of professionalism in the Salvadoran armed forces left El Salvador with a military that acted on its own behalf with savage actions against civilian noncombatants.¹⁰⁰ US trainers from all services faced the monumental task of upgrading Salvadoran military capabilities and tactics, which first required professionalizing Salvadoran armed forces. Efforts to professionalize the Salvadoran officer corps met with resistance until US national security assistance to El Salvador became a bargaining chip. During an official trip to San Salvador in December 1983, Vice President George Bush “provided categorical assurances” to El Salvador’s military that the US would terminate all assistance in the event the military did not support and protect the upcoming Salvadoran national elections and develop a respect for human rights. By 1987, the number of political murders for both sides had dropped to 23 per month, down from 610 per month in 1980.¹⁰¹

Salvadoran Inter-Service Competition

As with most third world countries, the social elite populated the officer corps and entrance into the Gerardo Barrios Military school was often limited to family of current or past officers. The officers of each graduating class, or *tanda*, formed close bonds and maintained those ties throughout their military careers. Officers within a *tanda*

¹⁰⁰ Kenneth E. Sharpe, “Rotten at the Corps: Officers’ Mafia in El Salvador”, *The Nation*, 19 October 1985, 372. Max Singer offers a different viewpoint concerning the civilian deaths: “Army brutality is another source of misunderstanding about the political situation within the Salvadoran officer corps. To understand the political meaning of such brutality a distinction must be made between ‘political killings’ and ‘guerrilla war killings.’...The fact that many killings by the army did not really serve any legitimate military purpose does not mean that they were not part of guerrilla war. They would not have happened but for that war, and therefore should be understood as ‘guerrilla war killings.’” (“ Militarism and Democracy in El Salvador”, *Society*, vol. 27, no. 6, September/October 1990, 52-53.)

¹⁰¹ Bacevich., 25.

cooperated to enhance one another's political position and participated openly in corrupt activities for personal financial gain.¹⁰²

Because of the *tanda* system, the armed forces traditionally ran more like the Mafia than a brotherhood in arms. Corruption was endemic to the corps, with the local joke being that the ranks of the officer corps were "lieutenant, captain, major, lieutenant colonel, and millionaire."¹⁰³ The Armed Forces Security Council, the ruling body of the military, was composed of seven to ten of the top-ranking officers representing the most powerful *tandas*. Leonel Gomez, advisor to the El Salvador's military council, observed in 1982:

For five prosperous years, the Council members and their allies within the armed forces will become fabulously wealthy through systematic corruption, fraud and kickbacks. At the end of five years, the Council members retire, and the next class of *tanda* [original italics] leaders move in to take their place...The Army's relationship with the country's economic elite is a mutually beneficial one. The oligarchy needs the Army to keep a starved and restless peasant workforce on the job for \$133 a year. But the Army needs the oligarchy as well, to keep the economy going. Immense profits go to top officers from kickbacks from government contracts with large businesses and industries.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² For excellent background information on the *tanda* system see Kenneth E. Sharpe, "Rotten at the Corps: Officers' Mafia in El Salvador", *The Nation*, 19 October 1985; Charles Lane, "The Pilot Shark of El Salvador", *The New Republic*, 24 September 1990; Joel Millman, "El Salvador's Army: A Force Unto Itself", *The New York Times Magazine*, 10 December 1989; Benjamin C. Schwarz, *American Counterinsurgency Doctrine and El Salvador: The Frustrations of Reform and the Illusions of Nation Building*, RAND Report R-4042-USDP (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1991), 17-22.

¹⁰³ Quoted in Martin Diskin and Kenneth Sharpe, *The Impact of U.S. Policy in El Salvador, 1979-1985* (Berkeley, CA: Institute of International Studies, 1987), 30.

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in Diskin and Sharpe, 30. The sentiment was that the armed forces "Fourteen Warlords" had replaced the "Fourteen Families" as the ruling elite (in reference to the brigade and detachment commanders controlling operations in the fourteen regional provinces of El Salvador.)

One of the most powerful *tandas*, the graduating class of 1966, was nicknamed the “*tonda*”, or big class. Members of this class rose to prominent ranks and position within the Salvadoran Armed Forces and government. Although not a member of the *tonda*, the commander of the FAS, Colonel Juan Rafael Bustillo maintained powerful ties to the members of that class. Colonel Bustillo, a proven combat pilot in the 1969 war with Honduras, assumed control of the air forces after the 1979 coup when Bustillo’s fellow *tanda* members picked him to run the air force.¹⁰⁵ For a decade, Colonel (later General) Bustillo maintained complete control over all the FAS aircraft and helicopters at Illopango Air Base and Comalapo Air Base. Such was his control that he reserved his helicopters for use by the FAS paratroop battalion and occasionally withheld support from Army commanders unless they were his *tanda* classmates.¹⁰⁶

As the FAS grew in size and importance during the war, competition increased between it and the army. In 1989, the Air Force displayed its displeasure and defiance after newly-elected President Christiani did not appoint the FAS commander as the Defense Minister. For two days the Air Force grounded aircraft at Illopango and threatened to boycott the war. A few days later during a military review, Air Force jets buzzed the reviewing stand of the outgoing Defense Minister, effectively drowning out his speech.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Hagedorn, 91.

¹⁰⁶ Lane, 28 and Bacevich, 31. General Bustillo is reputed to have operated one of the most lucrative smuggling operations out of Illopango, an accusation that has yet to be proven, but one that has ample circumstantial evidence and anonymous interviews to merit some level of belief. To his credit, General Bustillo brokered an agreement during the crisis between Colonel Ochoa (a departmental commander) and General Garcia (Minister of Defense) in 1982. He helped to avert what could have been a potentially explosive and violent coup between the Army and the Defense Ministry (Waghelstein, interview.)

¹⁰⁷ Lane, 31 and Millman, 42.

The Salvadoran Air Force and Army also lacked the willingness to plan and operate jointly until the mid-1980s. In 1983, the Salvadoran Army initiated the Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol (LRRP) program. The LRRPs were small units that would infiltrate or be inserted into guerilla-contested areas of the country, shadow the guerillas, and call in artillery or airstrikes to constantly harass and attrit insurgent. This plan called for insertion aircraft, standby helicopters and pilots at forward-deployed launch sites. Because it drew on FAS assets, already limited as they were, it took many months for General Bustillo to support this concept.¹⁰⁸

Cultural Factors

In the early 1980s, critics labeled the Salvadoran military as a “nine to five” army, noting its limited tempo of operations against the insurgents.¹⁰⁹ Many of the officers and enlisted troops were simply not committed to fighting against the highly motivated insurgents.¹¹⁰ Over time, the military increased their efforts both against the insurgents and for the support of the people. But this came only after President Duarte forced changes in the military leadership.

The FAS also did not inform the Salvadoran people of their efforts against the insurgents very well. Lt Col Salvador Palacios, former O-2 and A-37 FAS Group Commander, believes that lack of communication between the military and the people

¹⁰⁸ John D. Waghelstein, “Ruminations of a Pachyderm or What I Learned in the Counter-insurgency Business”, *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, vol. 5, no. 3 (Winter 1994): 367, and Waghelstein, interview.

¹⁰⁹ George C. Herring, “Vietnam, El Salvador, and the Uses of History”, *El Salvador: Central America in the New Cold War*, ed. Marvin E. Gettleman et. al. (New York, NY: Grove Press 1986), 373 and Petraeus, 45.

¹¹⁰ Diskin and Sharpe, 30.

detracted from the effort of gaining civilian support.¹¹¹ Perhaps because of the military-dominated government, the armed forces in general did not feel the need to educate or justify their operations to the civilian masses. As a result, flights overhead, especially strike operations, may have appeared as random and indiscriminate attacks on the population. Colonel John Waghelstein made these same observations, and attempted to increase the US Military Group's communication with the press corps to highlight the positive aspects of El Salvador's struggle against the insurgents.¹¹²

Command, Control and Operations

Tasking Air Assets

The limited American presence gave the Salvadorans control of the air war. They guarded their airspace with almost jealous fervor and insisted on being provided all the flight details of the three American helicopters in country.¹¹³ However, the FAS exercised their control through an extremely primitive Tactical Air Command Center (TACC).¹¹⁴ The TACC, at Illopango Air Base, received most incoming information and requests for air support over non-secure telephone lines.

Prior to the mid-1980s, the FAS operated with moderate effectiveness, but for the most part, air operations were autonomous and separate from ground operations. Many

¹¹¹ Lt Col Salvador Palacios, student Air War College, interviewed by author, 2 April 1999. Lt Col Palacios served as an O-2 pilot, and later A-37 pilot in the FAS and flew in combat during the entirety of El Salvador's war. With over 1000 combat missions, Lt Col Palacios served as Squadron Commander of O-2 operations Group Commander of O-2 and A-37 operations.

¹¹² John D. Waghelstein, "El Salvador and the Press: A Personal Account", *Parameters*, vol. XV, no. 3 (Autumn 1985): 66-70.

¹¹³ Maj. David H. Petraeus, USA, "El Salvador and the Vietnam Analogy", *Armed Forces Journal International*, February 1987, 44.

¹¹⁴ Klingaman, interview. The radios used in the TACC were "fugitives from other systems."

missions were the result of villagers calling in to the FAS and requesting air support to put down an attack by the insurgents. In March 1983, when insurgents attacked the village of La Speranza, two villagers traveled for almost a full day to the air base of Illopango. After explaining their plight to General Bustillo, the general ordered a strike package of A-37s to launch immediately. General Bustillo placed one of the villagers in the O-2 aircraft observer flight preceding the strike package to provide knowledge of the village area, and to help discriminate between friend and foe. In this way, the mission was initiated, and to a certain degree, controlled by residents from the area under attack.¹¹⁵

Mission Planning and Targeting Guidance

Just as in Vietnam, Salvadoran forces faced the difficulty of distinguishing between friend and foe on the ground. Although support flowed from Nicaragua, the rebels also received abundant support from the local population.¹¹⁶ Thus, though airborne assets could locate groups of people in the harsh, mountainous terrain, the crews were often unable to identify whether they were hostile. This inability to positively identify insurgent targets, coupled with the lack of intelligence concerning rebel strongholds, resulted in some indiscriminate air attacks that killed few rebels but caused numerous civilian fatalities. These civilian deaths, magnified in the world press, only caused political grief for the Salvadoran government and underscored its inability to effectively combat the insurgents.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Petraeus, 44.

¹¹⁷ Dr. James S. Corum, "The Air War in El Salvador," *Airpower Journal*, vol. XII, no. 2, Summer 1998, 40-41.

Later in the war, the FAS developed procedures to help distinguish friend from foe during night operations. The FAS had not historically flown and employed at night, but US trainers assisted in developing night tactics and procedures.¹¹⁸ Eventually, FAS A-37s employed flares to light up the ground below to help with target identification. On a notable mission in December 1989, the FAS employed this method of flare-identification, coupled with communications with ground forces, to prevent the FMLN from overrunning friendly Salvadoran Army forces.¹¹⁹

Combat Intelligence

Prior to 1986, the FAS did not have the collection capability or the reporting structure to take full advantage of possible intelligence sources. For instance, as early as 1982 US Air Force OV-1 Mohawk and C-130 aircraft flying out of Honduras provided some reconnaissance information on rebel activity and located bases that were crucial to the insurgent campaign.¹²⁰ The US overflights of the area revealed elaborate reinforced bunkers, training areas and other infrastructure devoted to long-term existence. In this area, the FMLN maintained secure bases that housed insurgent political and military leadership. Unfortunately, because of limited intelligence processing and dissemination capability, the FAS either would not or could not assimilate this information into their mission planning. In 1986-87 the FAS intelligence section reorganized and activated a special analysis center at FAS headquarters to support mission planning for joint

¹¹⁸ Waghelstein, *Observations*, 46.

¹¹⁹ Lt Col Palacios was the flight leader of an A-37 strike package assigned to provide support during this mission (Palacios, interview.)

¹²⁰ Tammy Arbuckle, "Same Hardware, Same Tactics, Same Conclusions in El Salvador?", *Armed Forces Journal International*, December 1985, 46 and Robert S. Greenberger and Clifford Krauss, "Reagan Plan to Revive Intelligence Flights Used by El Salvador Prompts Concern", *Wall Street Journal*, August 8, 1984, 35.

operations.¹²¹ This center fused reconnaissance as well as intelligence into one coherent planning system which provided more timely and accurate information for FAS mission planning.

When the Salvadorans conducted military operations in the northern provinces, their own movements telegraphed their intentions to the clandestine intelligence network of the rebels.¹²² Helicopters laden with government troops were launched from villages in the south without any tactical deception to deny rebels warning of their destination or intentions. The rudimentary insurgent intelligence network used open phone lines to communicate numbers, launch times and predicted flight route of the government forces, allowing insurgents to dictate the time, place and manner of confrontation.

The US-inspired Operation WELL-BEING launched in 1983 confirmed a rebel capability to anticipate large attacks with their intelligence network. Operating out of San Vicente's northern sector, Salvadoran infantry were ferried by helicopter and trucks via easily observable boarding and launching areas. This information was relayed to rebel troops in the target areas, and allowed their forces to follow textbook guerrilla strategy by dispersing and avoiding large-scale military confrontation.¹²³

The reverse of this intelligence dilemma allowed insurgents to perform attacks on high-level government positions. Rebel leaders were able to gain intelligence from their

¹²¹ Transforming intelligence processes was just one by-product of the National Joint Coordination Committee efforts in March 1986. In 1987, El Salvador established the Escuela de Nacional de Inteligencia, which was designed to centralize the training of those involved in intelligence gathering (Williams and Walter, 119 and 167.)

¹²² When the army launched attacks into FMLN zones of influence, it passed through interlocking network of guerilla hamlets and cantons to reach the zone. When it passed through this network, the masses and FMLN militia compiled intelligence on the passing units (Bracamonte and Spencer, *Strategy and Tactics of the Salvadoran FMLN Guerrillas*, 49.)

¹²³ Arbuckle, 48. This occurred repeatedly in 1984 and 1985 during government operations into northern Morazan (on the Honduran border).

network to plan a series of successful raids: the December 1983 attack on the main army barracks in Chalatenango; the January 1984 destruction of the heavily guarded Cuscutlan bridge; and the June 1984 raid on the Cerron Grande Dam.¹²⁴ The most disastrous attack on the FAS occurred in January 1982 at Illopango, the major air base in El Salvador. Rebels destroyed 50% to 70% of the aircraft on the ground.¹²⁵ However, the US replaced the losses with newer and more capable aircraft such as the A-37 and O-2.

Other Significant Factors

Rules of Engagement

The El Salvadoran Armed Forces had no established ROE to guide early operations in the war. As early as 1982, General Nutting, then CINCSOUTH, testified that the US was operating in a training capacity, not an advisory or operational capacity. As such, he felt that talks meant to address ROE “would probably run into some concerns for sovereignty” and that he was not aware of any attempt to officially communicate recommended ROE to the Salvadoran government.¹²⁶ Not until 1984 did President Duarte institute measures to reduce the mounting civilian casualties—and then only in response to international outrage over human rights violations.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Diskin and Sharpe, 29-30 and Arbuckle, 52. Though the dam was not destroyed, the successful attack in which 100 Salvadoran troops were killed, demonstrated the ineffectiveness of the Salvadoran army to defend themselves.

¹²⁵ Tommie Sue Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador: Origins and Evolution* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1982), and Corum, 32.

¹²⁶ Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Presidential Certifications on Conditions in El Salvador*, 97th Cong., 2nd sess., 3 August 1982, 43. General Nutting did go on to say that he felt that they had some semblance of ROE in an “indirect fashion”, referring to the efforts of the 39 trainers in country.

¹²⁷ Leach, 233.

Even without the directive by President Duarte, FAS pilots exercised caution during strike missions to avoid civilian fratricide. General Bustillo required his pilots to acquire “eyes on target” to reduce collateral deaths during strikes.¹²⁸ Unfortunately, not every pilot complied with or was as capable of discriminating between friendly and hostile ground combat activity. However, FAS leadership attempted to limit incidental deaths due to air strikes. Later in the war, Major Michael Brogan, a US Army communications officer assigned to the Military Group in El Salvador, witnessed occurrences when FAS pilots called off bombing raids because the risk of harming civilians was too great.¹²⁹

Training

Both pilot training and maintenance training lagged behind the expanding force structure. As of 1987, the FAS owned 135 aircraft, yet it had only 70 active pilots.¹³⁰ To compensate for the lack of pilots, each pilot needed to maintain proficiency in more than one aircraft, a problem further exacerbated by shortage in qualified instructor pilots. Lack of indigenous training facilities and instructors forced most FAS to be trained either in the United States or at the Inter-American Air Force Academy at Albrook Field in Panama.¹³¹ To reduce the turn-around time for graduating trained pilots, in 1984 the US eventually waived the preflight requirement for six months of English training school for Salvador pilot candidates.¹³² Also, because American officers serving in a war zone were

¹²⁸ Klingaman, Palacios, and Waghelstein. All three individuals confirmed during interviews that Bustillo required pilots to positively identify enemy ground forces before attacking.

¹²⁹ Michael Patrick Brogan, Maj, USA, *The Impact of the Vietnam Analogy on American Policy in El Salvador from 1979-1984* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College, 1994), 30.

¹³⁰ Bacevich, 32.

¹³¹ Corum, 32.

¹³² Waghelstein, *Observations*, 46.

forbidden to take any action that might result in immediate disadvantage to the enemy, instructor pilots charged with improving FAS tactical effectiveness could not fly with them on missions to assess their competence or debrief their tactics.¹³³

Maintenance practices, deplorable to begin with, also suffered from a lack of trained mechanics.¹³⁴ The poorly educated conscripts were unable to master the intricacies of aviation maintenance and US maintenance trainers walked a fine line trying to improve FAS maintenance practices.¹³⁵ Again, because of the “no combat” restriction on US personnel, trainers were not allowed to perform maintenance on aircraft used for combat operations; however, almost every aircraft was designated to support the war effort. This conundrum made US trainer involvement difficult at best. They could not physically load armament or perform routine pre- and post-flight maintenance on line aircraft.¹³⁶ Therefore, US trainers had limited opportunity to actually demonstrate techniques or work with the Salvadorans to devise methods suitable to their environment.

Limitations

The result of successful guerrilla raids on government installations forced the Salvadoran government to commit troops and resources to protect air assets and their support systems. When the US supplied A-37s, AC-47s, and UH-1 helicopters, this introduced a logistics trail of spare parts, fuel, training and flight crews—all of which were necessary components to complete the air missions. Salvadoran forces that guarded these components were taken from the same forces that operated in the field against the

¹³³ Bacevich, 10, and Klingaman interview.

¹³⁴ Waghelstein and Klingaman interviews.

¹³⁵ Bacevich, 32.

¹³⁶ Klingaman, interview.

insurgents. Removing soldiers from offensive operations reduced the capability of the government to contest the insurgents.¹³⁷

El Salvador: Conclusions

Eventual Outcomes

In November 1989, the FMLN launched its “final offensive” against the Salvadoran government.¹³⁸ The FMLN intended to attack not only military targets, but also planned to occupy parts of San Salvador, the capital of El Salvador. Similar to the Viet Cong in the Tet Offensive of 1968, the FMLN rebels underestimated Salvadoran military capability. The FMLN exhausted its military capability in the “final offensive”, yet still maintained the ability to harass and deny El Salvador armed forces complete victory. Though the FMLN tried a second counteroffensive in 1990, their failure proved the FMLN was no longer a potent military threat. Realizing they had no capacity to physically overthrow the government, the insurgents adopted a “talk, talk, fight, fight” strategy, hoping to win political, if not military success.¹³⁹

Over the next two years, the FMLN and El Salvador engaged in politico-military attempts to secure peace. Finally, in January 1992, the two sides signed a peace agreement. The FMLN disbanded completely as a military organization, but in return, received considerable concessions: land reforms, national police reforms and a purge of the military human-rights abusers.¹⁴⁰ Though disarming the FMLN was complicated, as

¹³⁷ Arbuckle, 56.

¹³⁸ Known as the Strategic Counter-Offensive, or “Until the Limit” by the FMLN (Bracamonte and Spencer, 33.)

¹³⁹ Ibid, 35.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 36.

of this writing the FMLN is recognized as a legitimate political party and the country of El Salvador has enjoyed seven years of peace.

El Salvador: Lessons Learned

Unlike US military build-up in South Vietnam, America did not make the Salvadoran Armed Forces into a “mini-US” military. The US remained true to the policy of keeping the war “Salvadoran.” The US specifically limited US involvement to a small number of troops stationed in country. This limitation meant that any direct influence on Salvadoran military operations by the trainers came from a limited few. It also meant the US did not install infrastructure to support a large influx of American personnel and material. As such, the US did not upgrade Salvadoran airbases, install a Joint Operations Center or a communications network, or attempt to drastically modify their command and control structure.. The FAS made progress towards successful joint operations at their own pace.

Another significant issue the trainers faced was the rampant corruption and the *tanda*-centered officer corps. With limited personnel to supplant current mode of operations, US personnel could only watch as corrupt officers made poor military decisions in order to further their careers or line their pockets. Admittedly, there were forward-looking officers who rebelled against the status quo, most notably those who instigated the 1979 coup. But for several years the officers of the *tonda* held sway in military and political matters.

In spite of the challenges, the trainers learned to help the Salvadorans help themselves. As of 1992, El Salvador has enjoyed a relatively stable peace—a peace fought for and won by Salvadorans.

Chapter 4

US Air Force Counterinsurgency Doctrinal Guidance

The employment of aviation in small wars is characterized by the operation of many small units, two or three plane patrols, over a wide area.

—US Marine Corps *Small Wars Manual*, 1940

Role of Doctrine

For the airman, “Air and space doctrine is a statement of officially sanctioned beliefs and warfighting principles that describe and guide the proper use of air and space forces in military operations.”¹⁴¹ Air Force Doctrine Document 1 (AFDD) goes on further to state that doctrine is “meant to codify accumulated wisdom and provide a framework for the way we prepare for, plan and conduct air and space operations.”¹⁴² The US Army takes a similar point of view with their capstone document, Field Manual (FM) 100-5, *Operations*. For the Army, “...doctrine must be definitive enough to guide specific actions, yet remain adaptable enough to address diverse and varied situations worldwide.”¹⁴³ From these statements one may deduce that airmen and soldiers ought to be able to turn to doctrine for guidance when preparing for war. What then is the current

¹⁴¹ Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 1, *Air Force Basic Doctrine*, September 1997, 1.

¹⁴² Ibid, 1.

¹⁴³ Field Manual (FM) 100-5, *Operations*, June 1993.

doctrine, or guidance, for Air Force operations in counterinsurgencies? To answer this question, this chapter will review Air Force and Joint Service doctrine for applicability to the counterinsurgency situation. Additionally, this chapter briefly reviews other services' doctrine as a possible source of guidance for the airman.

US Air Force Doctrine

The US Air Force's capstone doctrine document, AFDD 1, *Air Force Basic Doctrine* espouses the strengths of a technologically advanced military. Its opening passages about the use of air and space power leaves no doubt in the reader's mind that airpower can bring to bear incredible pressure on an enemy, precisely selecting the time and place of its application. Describing one of the tenets of airpower, *Synergistic Effects*, AFDD 1 states, "...it is the precise, coordinated application of the various elements of air, space and surface forces which brings disproportionate pressure on enemy leaders to comply with our national will."¹⁴⁴ One of the Air Force's core competencies, *Precision Engagement*, states air and space power provides the "scalpel", able to apply "discriminate" force precisely where required and will have "...the ability to have superior situational awareness, and to mass force anywhere and attack any facet of the enemy's power."¹⁴⁵

The use of airpower in counterinsurgency operations is not mentioned in AFDD-1. When describing Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW), AFDD 1 lists "Nation

¹⁴⁴ AFDD 1, 24.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 30.

Assistance” as one of many typical non-combat operations.¹⁴⁶ The Basic Doctrine of the Air Force does refer to the use of airpower in Special Operations, one of air and space power’s functions. Referring to Special Operations, AFDD 1 goes on to briefly describe the role of airpower in Foreign Internal Defense (FID), which is where other doctrine documents describe insurgency and counterinsurgency operations. However, the Air Force’s capstone doctrine document does not explicitly reference counterinsurgency operations within its pages.

As for the organization and control of air assets, AFDD 2, *Organization and Employment of Aerospace Power*, provides key guidance to the airman. AFDD 2 very aptly lays out the continuum of war from peacetime to war winning and how air assets mobilize, deploy and employ in support of national objectives. Key to this document is the chapter that provides guidance for designating a Joint Forces Air Component Commander (JFACC) and his responsibilities.¹⁴⁷ AFDD 2 makes it very clear that air forces assigned to a theater commander should come under the direction of a single air boss, the JFACC. The JFACC then must coordinate his air effort with the entire theater campaign to ensure his effort support the Joint Force Commander’s objectives.

Perhaps just as important are the chapters that provide detailed explanations of Joint Air Operations Center (JAOC) functions and the development process for the Joint Air and Space Operations Plan (JASOP).¹⁴⁸ The system developed in these two chapters provides the airmen with a workable blueprint for preparing an air strategy that

¹⁴⁶ The US Air Force considers counterinsurgency to be a portion of foreign internal defense (FID), which it further considers to be a portion of nation assistance (AFDD 2-3, Military Operations Other Than War, October 1995, 13.)

¹⁴⁷ AFDD 2, *Organization and Employment of Aerospace Power*, September 1998, 41-51.

¹⁴⁸ AFDD 2, Chapter Five: “The Joint Air Operations Center”, 63-74 and Chapter Six: “The Joint Air and Space Operations Plan”, 74-84.

coordinates with other service functions to deliver airpower in its best form at the right place and at the right time.¹⁴⁹ These chapters, based on the US Air Force model, make the assumption that the resources, personnel and organizational culture will support the assigning JFACC, standing up a JAOC and producing a coordinated JASOP.

AFDD 2-3, *Military Operations Other Than War*, describes FID operations as those that support a host nation's fight against insurgency and focuses on "...counterinsurgency support to defeat an internal threat attempting to overthrow the established host government." This same passage goes on to say that "Successful counterinsurgents realized the true nature of the threat to the established government lies in the people's perception of their government's inability to solve problems."¹⁵⁰ The strategy advocated relies on an internal defense and development (IDAD) scheme to build political, economic, military, and social institutions that respond to the needs of society.¹⁵¹ The whole of the document, however, focuses on dealing with multinational issues in MOOTW operations more along the lines of humanitarian efforts (such as efforts in Somalia), post-conflict efforts (such as Operation NORTHERN WATCH), or emergency relief assistance (such as natural disasters.) To explore specific guidance for the Air Force in counterinsurgencies, one needs to turn to AFDD 2-7.1, *Foreign Internal Defense*.

¹⁴⁹ The five-stage planning process involves operational environment research, objective determination, center of gravity identification, strategy development, and JASOP development (AFDD 2, 76-84.)

¹⁵⁰ AFDD 2-3, *Military Operations Other Than War*, October 1996, 13.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 13-14. This document uses the example of advisory support rendered by Air Force personnel to El Salvador to illustrate how the USAF can contribute to the successful conclusion of a counterinsurgency war.

US Air Force Foreign Internal Defense Doctrine

The opening passages of AFDD 2-7.1 state that US Air Force assistance in FID operations “focuses on supporting foreign military forces in performing traditional air and space roles and missions.”¹⁵² To emphasize this focus, AFDD 2-7.1 outlines six specific FID objectives that deal with training, advising and assisting foreign governments with employing and maintaining air and space power assets; transferring aviation assets to the host nation under the Security Assistance Program; and providing direct support to host nations (to include combat firepower for tactical operations.)

Laying the foundation for the thought process of combating insurgencies, AFDD 2-7.1 offers Appendix A, “Insurgency and Counterinsurgency”, as a primer for understanding and evaluating the basic components of an insurgency and counterinsurgency.¹⁵³ Appendix A highlights the ideological and political component that drives and sustains an insurgency, showing that insurgents fight their war on many fronts (social, economic, informational, political, and military.) This appendix offers lessons distilled from Mao’s essays on protracted warfare and describes the insurgency process as three phases: incipient/pre-hostilities, guerrilla warfare, and conventional confrontation.¹⁵⁴ The first phase involves building political and insurgent movement infrastructure and support. The second phase inflicts selective attacks to expand insurgent bases and build popular support. The third phase moves into conventional combat as the insurgents develop enough combat capability to challenge the legitimate government as a military power. Understanding the roots of insurgency and the phased

¹⁵² AFDD 2-7.1, *Foreign Internal Defense*, February 1998, 2.

¹⁵³ AFDD 2-7.1, Appendix A: “Insurgency and Counterinsurgency”, 63-71.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 66-67.

activity of insurgent activity leads to a strategy that “requires a wide range of social, economic, informational, political, and military initiatives.”¹⁵⁵ AFDD 2-7.1 makes it very clear that the unique political-ideological challenges of countering an insurgency demands that all instruments of power be combined into a single, integrated IDAD program comprised of both military and civilian resources. Appendix A concludes with the warning that the social and political implications of military actions should be completely understood lest the excessive or ineffective use of force erode government legitimacy and promote support for the insurgents.¹⁵⁶

With regard to the real-world aspects of assisting a lesser-developed nation in their counterinsurgency efforts, AFDD 2-7.1 offers a laundry list of potential shortfalls in host nation aviation operations capabilities. The document warns that the actual composition of the host nation’s air force may be “relatively low in terms of force size, total sortie potential, resource consumption and availability, and overall support costs.”¹⁵⁷ It goes on to point out that these airframes may be well-used, older aircraft, which may cause difficulty in obtaining spare parts and supplies; that their simplicity may allow easier, more innovative maintenance procedures; and that in some cases, the entire military aviation program of a host nation may be completely dependent upon foreign assistance.

The limitations on keeping a lesser developed military air force flying include insufficient training of pilots and maintenance personnel, limited major aircraft repair facilities, lack of publications published in host nation language and inadequate funding

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 68.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 71.

¹⁵⁷ AFDD 2-7.1, 9.

to maintain, much less upgrade, the current force.¹⁵⁸ Additionally, although host nation pilots develop adequate basic flying skills, many individuals are “insufficiently trained in joint tactics, techniques and procedures.”¹⁵⁹ In most cases, outside training assistance is needed to generate host nation training programs capable of providing self-sustaining internal personnel needs.

Aside from assessing airframes and personnel dedicated to keeping the force in the air, AFDD 2-7.1 cautions that the command and control infrastructure of a lesser-developed may be primitive, or non-existent.¹⁶⁰ Typically, these countries have a very limited capability for intelligence, surveillance or reconnaissance with aircraft. Most intelligence information comes from human resources. However, even when collected, most countries do not have the centralized capability to fuse, assess and distribute intelligence gained. In addition, AFDD 2-7.1 describes lesser-developed communications networks being based on “obsolete, low-performance radios that provide poor connectivity between air and surface elements.”¹⁶¹ Finally, this section closes by stating the “makeshift nature of communications” in a typical host country makes it vulnerable to jamming and interception, limits its ability to extend throughout the area of operations, and may produce a lack of communications security.¹⁶²

As a prescription for airpower application against insurgencies, AFDD 2-7.1 states, “...the principal weight of air and space power should be applied where the government

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 10-11.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 11.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 12.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 12.

¹⁶² Ibid, 12.

seeks critical points of leverage against the insurgent movement.”¹⁶³ Airpower can support the counterinsurgency effort through development and mobilization (nation assistance) or security and neutralization (defeating insurgent military forces.)¹⁶⁴ The critical enabler to successful application of airpower in counterinsurgencies is coordinating its application in the overall IDAD strategy and integrating it as one of the joint components of the internal defense effort. Bombing for strategic effect or precision engagement are not addressed as concepts of the counterinsurgency air effort, but rather the missions described are intelligence collection, airlift, close air support and interdiction, and psychological operations. Finally, AFDD 2-7.1 recommends that public information programs must be in effect to explain both nation assistance and military air activities.¹⁶⁵ In this way, the government can explain and clarify the objectives and targets of each activity, thereby relieving fear and anxiety among friendly elements whose only source of information may be insurgent-based propaganda.

At the crux of the command and control (C2) issue, AFDD 2-7.1 states, “As a general rule, US Air Force FID forces employed in combat operations should be organized, commanded and controlled on the basis of guidance established in joint and US Air Force doctrines,” and that C2 are established on “the principle of centralized military control and decentralized execution.”¹⁶⁶ However, the document goes on to admit that, “Significant C2 interoperability problems typically involve incompatible equipment and standards, language barriers, differing C2 procedures, lack of host-nation experience, and inadequate host-nation logistics infrastructures to maintain modern

¹⁶³ Ibid, 14.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 15.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 19.

communications equipment.”¹⁶⁷ This one line captures the essence of the interoperability problem if US Air Force personnel work to integrate into, or attempt to create a C2 system modeled on US Air Force requirements. This becomes an especially difficult issue when the US Ambassador, as head of the country team, oversees American involvement.

As for actual assessments of host nation air and space capability, AFDD 2-7.1 advises survey and assessment teams to determine if the host nation can achieve their operational objectives with their own assets, and any upgrades or resources assistance should be maintainable within the technological resources of the recipient nation.¹⁶⁸ The assessment may divulge less of a need for equipment and more of a need for thought on the correct use and control of airpower. The FID doctrine for the US Air Force drives home the point that advisors can help host commanders apply an operational perspective to focus on the political and psychological implications of air combat operations.

In any event, the assessment and follow-on support effort should not lead to “self-generating requirements for increasingly higher levels of US military involvement.”¹⁶⁹ Attempting to keep the war a host nation responsibility is a theme that runs through AFDD 2-7.1. As a final caution, this document describes the inherent dilemma when supporting a besieged friendly nation. Host nation air and space requirements may exceed the limitations of security assistance, however a US combat role may also be “tactically inappropriate or politically infeasible as a FID instrument.”¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 35.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 38.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, 54.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 56.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 57.

US Joint Doctrine

Joint doctrine applies air and space doctrine to joint operations and “describes the best way to integrate and employ air and space forces with land and naval forces in military action.”¹⁷¹ Therefore, one would not expect to see drastic contrasts between Air Force service doctrine and joint doctrine. However, it is instructive to identify the areas joint doctrine covers with respect to joint operations. Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Doctrine for Joint Operations*, highlights numerous items of significance for multinational operations. One of the key items is cultural differences, such as language or religion, and may present “the most immediate challenge.”¹⁷² Additionally, command, control and coordination of efforts can be just as challenging because “Differences in language, equipment, capabilities, doctrine, and procedures are some of the interoperability challenges that mandate close cooperation.”¹⁷³ Finally, in the planning stage, it cautions that foreign liaison officers may not have authority to make decision, and that the entire intelligence gathering and dissemination process “can be a challenge.”¹⁷⁴

As with Air Force doctrine, the preponderance of guidance for military activity in counterinsurgencies is contained in the FID document, JP 3-07.1, *Joint Tactics, Techniques and Procedures (JTTP) for Foreign Internal Defense*. However, its guidance applies to the full range of US land, sea and air military activities and capabilities and therefore is not detailed enough to offer explicit guidance to airmen. The few pearls of wisdom contained in the document reiterate the delicate nature of engaging in a foreign nation’s war against insurgents. As stated in JP 3-07.1, “The fundamental principle of all

¹⁷¹ AFDD 1, 3.

¹⁷² Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Doctrine for Joint Operations*, February 1995, VI-3,4.

¹⁷³ Ibid, VI-6,7.

FID efforts is that they foster internal solutions and assist Internal Defense and Development (IDAD) programs for which the supported nation has ultimate responsibility and control.”¹⁷⁵ The host nation is ultimately responsible for undertaking the strategic initiative to “preserve its legitimacy and ensure a lasting solution to the problem...”¹⁷⁶ Finally, JP 3-07.1 dictates that US tactical participation in host nation efforts “requires judicious and prudent rules of engagement (ROE) and guidelines for application of force.”¹⁷⁷ All of the above guidance from JP 3-07.1 maintains a focus on keeping the host nation in charge of directing its own counterinsurgency efforts.

US Army and Marine Corps Doctrine

Both the Army and Marine Corps present counterinsurgency operations with a greater level of detail than Air Force doctrine. Each service provides excellent discussions on the roots of and the development of an insurgent movement.¹⁷⁸ But their level of detail goes beyond an amplified discussion of insurgent causes. For instance, Marine FMFM 8-2, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, provides an entire section on intelligence. In addition to espousing how important yet difficult intelligence collection is in a lesser-developed country, FMFM 8-2 elaborates on the type of information required, where to collect it, what sources to use, how to interpret the information

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, VI-10.

¹⁷⁵ JP 3-07.1, Joint Tactics, Techniques and Procedures for Foreign Internal Defense, June 1996, I-3.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, I-13.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, I-14.

¹⁷⁸ The Army provides excellent background information on the nature of insurgency in the following documents: Field Manual (FM) 7-98, *Operations in a Low-Intensity Conflict*, October 1992; FM 31-20, *Doctrine for Special Forces Operations*, April 1990; FM 31-20-3, *Foreign Internal Defense*, September 1994; and FM 90-8, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, August 1986. The Marines also provide excellent reference information on insurgencies with Fleet Marine Force Manual (FMFM) 8-2, *Counterinsurgency Operations*, January 1980.

collected and a host of other subjects pertinent to developing a successful intelligence network.¹⁷⁹ One finds similar levels of detail in Army doctrine, such as the section on combat service support for counterinsurgency operations.¹⁸⁰ This contrast in level of detail between Air Force and Army/Marine Corps doctrine is typical throughout most of the doctrine documents.

An additional document published jointly by the US Air Force and Army is FM 100-20/Air Force Pamphlet (AFP) 3-20, *Military Operations in Low Intensity Conflict*. This joint publication is a blend between the levels of detail in Air Force and Army doctrinal manuals. As a result, there is no information that offers additional specific guidance to the airman. However, FM 100-20/AFP 3-20 does offer a guide to counterinsurgency operations that covers the spectrum of operations from consolidation of capability within the host nation, to strike operations, to post conflict missions. This guide, coupled with AFDD 2, which discusses the development of a JASOP, may provide a starting point for determining rebel centers of gravity to develop an integrated air strategy.

Counterinsurgency Doctrine: Minimal Guidance for Airmen

Doctrine is not meant to provide a blueprint for battle, nor is to be so superfluous as to be of no merit whatever. US airmen may use doctrine for specific guidance, for reference, or for education during peacetime. Whichever the case, doctrine must provide a solid grounding in the accumulated wisdom and beliefs of a military organization. US Air Force counterinsurgency doctrine should draw upon its experiences from involvement in wars such as Vietnam and El Salvador. Appropriately, current Air Force

¹⁷⁹ FMFM 8-2, "Section 7: Intelligence", 55-70.

doctrine enumerates some of the challenges presented to airmen in those wars and others like it. However, it differs from the US Army and Marine doctrine in the level of detail presented to the reader. This level of detail for Air Force doctrine may address the flexibility inherent to airpower, but misses the mark when the airmen is faced with the challenge of advising and training another country in the art of applying air and space power in a counterinsurgency campaign. Joint doctrine is even less specific and provides little concrete guidance for airmen in counterinsurgencies.

¹⁸⁰ FM 7-98, Chapter 8, Section II: “Support for Insurgency and Counterinsurgency Operations”, 8-8 to 8-14.

Chapter 5

Counterinsurgency Reality versus Doctrinal Guidance

“...doctrine shapes the manner in which the Air Force organizes, trains, equips, and sustains its forces.”

—AFDD 1

Air Force Basic Doctrine

Counterinsurgency Reality: Lessons for Airmen

At least four key requirements can be drawn from the case studies presented in Chapters 2 and 3 that are relevant to future US Air Force involvement in counterinsurgencies. The first requirement is to ensure the host government's intelligence system provides accurate, timely and secure intelligence. The second is to recognize the technical capabilities and deficiencies of the host nation, and the potential political impact of US-sponsored aid to upgrade its capabilities. The third is to recognize who “runs the show” and understand the degree of US Air Force control. And finally, the fourth and perhaps most important lesson is to develop a coherent air strategy that supports the objectives of the host country.

Ensure host government's intelligence system provides accurate, timely and secure intelligence. Valid and timely intelligence is absolutely critical to success in defeating insurgents because of the unique characteristics of rebels using guerrilla tactics.

Insurgents blend with, move among and are supported by the people. Their guerrilla war strategy is normally based on maintaining a strategic defense, while harassing and attriting government forces. Timely intelligence allows government forces to constantly pressure and attrit insurgent ranks. However, intelligence is a product of the technological and organizational infrastructure of the host country, and lesser-developed countries normally have no centralized system to perform adequate intelligence collection and analysis functions, and have no procedure for timely dissemination.

Filling this intelligence void may require upgrading and/or restructuring the host government's intelligence system. After the 1986 Salvadoran intelligence organization restructuring, near real-time intelligence information gave the FAS the ability to apply continued pressure to FMLN rebels.¹⁸¹ In contrast, lack of timely target intelligence, which caused slow response time to requests for immediate air support in South Vietnam, was identified as a problem in a Special Assistance Inspection of Southeast Asia as late as 1964.¹⁸² In addition to intelligence infrastructure deficiencies, the root causes of the insurgency (such as human rights violations) are likely to cause the civilian population to refuse information to the government forces. Counterinsurgency expert Max Manwaring argues that the El Salvadoran military recognized this fact and modified their prisoner interrogation methods. The military realized that humanely treated prisoners offered a good source of intelligence and also encouraged defections among the rebels, which resulted in improved Salvadoran military performance.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ Palacios, interview.

¹⁸² Colonel Franklin, chief, PACAF Assistance Team to HQ 2nd Air Division, special assistance inspection, September 1964 (included in History, 2nd Air Division, January-June 1964, Chapter Two, USAF Operations (Supporting Documents), 7.

¹⁸³ Max G. Manwaring and Court Prisk, *El Salvador at War: An Oral History* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1988), 324-328.

The host government's system must also provide intelligence security. A lesser-developed country possesses few assets, so every loss exacts a more severe toll in its resources. Unless the US or another third party country supplies parts and equipment as fast as they are destroyed, the host government cannot afford to lose resources due to intelligence lapses. Intelligence security presents unique challenges in countries that possess no secure communications methods, rely on open source telephones, and whose armed forces insurgent sympathizers may infiltrate. Informants in both the Vietnamese and Salvadoran conflicts were suspected of passing information concerning operational details to rebel forces. One of the prime examples of poor operational security is the attack on Illopango air base when the Salvadoran Air Force lost at least fifty percent of their aviation assets. At this time, the FMLN possessed the entire listing of pilots in the FAS, information that was probably compromised at a high level.¹⁸⁴

Recognize the technical capabilities and deficiencies of the host nation, and the potential political impact of US-sponsored aid. This involves more than just knowing what aircraft are on the ramp; it requires knowledge of pilot training and proficiency, maintenance practices and procedures, repair and supply capability, joint service operations experience, and the potential political impact of increased US support in these areas. Most third world countries do not invest in the procedures, practices, training, and equipment required to maintain a viable air force. In both Vietnam and El Salvador, host nation air forces faced problems generated by old aircraft, deplorable maintenance and lack of parts. In both cases host nation air forces did not train for or execute joint operations or night missions. As a result, US advisors in both wars needed to develop

¹⁸⁴ Palacios, Interview.

credible recommendations for equipment and training upgrades compatible with host nation infrastructure. For example, US trainers in El Salvador balanced the needs of the Salvadoran military with what John Waghelstein called “goodie pushers”—individuals both in the US and El Salvador who wanted to provide high tech aircraft and armament to upgrade the Salvadoran air forces.¹⁸⁵

The potential political impact of US-sponsored aid is that increasing US support and/or presence may reduce the legitimacy of the host nation. In South Vietnam, introduction of high-tech equipment, such as radar sites, communication equipment and aircraft, required maintainers, technicians, trainers and other support personnel to deploy in order to insure successful installation and application of the resources. The significant US presence arguably diminished the legitimacy of the South Vietnamese government by highlighting the government’s inability to control its own destiny. In contrast, the US government made it very clear it would not send combat troops to El Salvador to defeat the rebels when it placed the 55-man limit on the number of trainers in country. Admittedly, the Air Force advisor assisting the host nation may not have the deciding vote concerning increased levels of assistance, but he can work to help the host nation produce technically and politically viable solutions with the resources it has.

Recognize who “runs the show” and understand the degree of US Air Force control. Airmen need to operate within the bounds of US command structures, yet they must also understand and deal with host nation politics. US military involvement in third country affairs is normally at the direction of a country team, headed by the US ambassador. As head of the country team in South Vietnam, Ambassador Nolting delayed further activity

¹⁸⁵ Waghelstein, “Ruminations”, 370. Military personnel and civilians alike in the US and El Salvador wanted to upgrade the FAS with the Northrop F-5 “Tiger.”

by FARMGATE personnel until he was clear on force structure organization. Even as the war in South Vietnam progressed, Nolting voiced his concerns directly to Washington about the performance of and adverse impact of air operations in South Vietnam. In El Salvador, Ambassador White performed a similar function when he agreed with Duarte on limiting the number of US military personnel allowed in country. Although the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 empowered the regional Commanders-in-Chief (CINCs) with more authority and autonomy in regional military affairs, the country team, led by the ambassador, still remains the focal point national affairs with the host country.

Within the host country national structure, air advisors need to work with a host nation's political and military command structure to affect changes in its organization and operations. The Salvadoran "tanda" system is typical of third world military class structure. Power is wielded by a select few and military operations can be affected by the personal relationships between these power brokers. One's position or status within the military ranks influences the degree of support received from other members, such as when Gen. Bustillo in El Salvador withheld air support from ground commanders based on graduating class dates. Similarly, pilots in South Vietnam could not conduct air strikes without the permission of a province chief; hence, the forward air controller's relationship with the province chief most often determined if air support would be permitted.

To succeed against insurgents, the incumbent government must foster a well-disciplined, highly professional, motivated military force capable of rapid and decisive actions designed to achieve political as well as military objectives. But how do Air Force advisors train and modernize, democratize, and professionalize a corrupt service, such as

the *tanda*-centered FAS was in El Salvador? Brigadier General Eggleston, acting chief of the MAAG Army section in South Vietnam, recognized the dilemma of promoting change without having command authority when he stated, “I am aware of the fact that we do not “command” in the usual sense of the word. However, the advent of U.S. support units in Vietnam, combined with experience in the advisory role, places field advisors in a position to influence tactical operations.”¹⁸⁶ Eggleston saw the role of the advisor as a method to induce positive change. Unfortunately, if US presence is limited to a low number of advisors, as it was in El Salvador, making an impact in the fundamental, culture-based practices of host nation officers is difficult, if not impossible. In fact, assistance and training had little impact on stemming corruption in FAS.¹⁸⁷ However, the threat of withholding military assistance by the US government worked to improve the force.

Develop a coherent air strategy that supports the objectives of the host country. This is not merely an “air and space operations strategy” to inflict the greatest damage on the rebels; it is a comprehensive recommendation for applying airpower to achieve the incumbent government’s political objectives. The civilian-military “duality” of insurgent strategies demands that air advisors remain mindful of the host nation’s need to win the war on both fronts—civilian and military. Airmen must answer the what, when, where, how and why for airpower as it connects to the overall IDAD plan.

One of the first steps is assessing host nation capabilities. In his report, Gen Woerner provided an insightful and honest assessment of the Salvadoran military’s

¹⁸⁶ Brig Gen H. K. Eggleston, Acting Chief, Army Section, Military Assistance Advisory Group, to wide distribution, subject: Methods of Improving RVNAF Operations, 30 March 1962 (included in Project CHECO Southeast Asia Report, Part V-A, Supporting Documents, October 1961-December 1963.)

¹⁸⁷ Williams and Walter, 147.

capabilities, limitations and deficiencies. He also made recommendations for restructuring and upgrading Salvadoran armed forces *based on El Salvadoran national objectives*, not US objectives. Next, advisors must be aware of the history of the struggle, understand the nature of the insurgency, and be familiar with nuances in the country's national character or culture. Unfortunately, American Air Force advisors involved in both South Vietnam and El Salvador had little understanding of the conflict or the enemy when they first arrived in country.

Finally, advisors must define and articulate the best use of airpower to support the government's struggle against the insurgency. Airmen must provide a cogent, practical strategy for the employment of airpower, from force application to civil and psychological airborne operations. For instance, airmen must recommend credible ROE. With the exception of certain situations (troops in contact, emergency defense measures, positively identified rebel concentrations) airborne firepower must be applied with extreme discretion to avoid civilian casualties or destruction of national infrastructure. Indiscriminate deaths became a US and host nation concern in both the South Vietnam and El Salvadoran wars. Additionally, advisors must not underrate the utility of civil and psychological airborne operations. These missions, flown to communicate and demonstrate the government's benevolence and willingness to reform, may play a significant role in gaining and maintaining control of the key center of gravity—the hearts and minds of the people.

Applicability and Sufficiency of Doctrine

Given the four requirements described above, does current doctrine provide useful guidance for Air Force members in their roles as trainers, advisors and compatriots in

another nation's war against insurgents? One must first describe the appropriate level of detail required for useful doctrinal guidance. I. B. Holley phrased well the role of doctrine:

Doctrine is not and was never meant to be prescriptive. Doctrine is suggestive. It says, 'This is what has usually worked best in the past,' but this in no way frees decision makers from the need to form their own judgement in any given situation.

Doctrines are not a series of universally valid maxims or positive prescriptions. They are points of departure for thoughtful decision maker, who must judge each situation individually. When we say doctrine is 'authoritative,' all we mean is that it is objectively recorded experience that remains worthy of and requires the critical attention of the decision maker.¹⁸⁸

Using this description as a benchmark, doctrine should capture lessons of critical experiences by past airmen and provide a "point of departure" for current airmen. For the US Air Force advisor to a foreign government that is combating insurgents, doctrine should provide guidance on the critical issues faced in past counterinsurgency operations, and be at a level of detail to at least prompt airmen to consider the issues when developing a course of action.

As presented, the first requirement for airmen is to ensure the host government's intelligence system provides accurate, timely and secure intelligence. Air Force doctrine acknowledges the difficulty in securing intelligence with third world communication networks, and Joint doctrine admits that the entire intelligence gathering and dissemination process "can be a challenge." Beyond that, Air Force and Joint doctrine do

¹⁸⁸ Maj Gen I. B. Holley Jr., USAFR, Retired, "Fifty Questions for Doctrine Writers: Means are as Important as Ends", *Airpower Journal*, vol. XI, no. 3 (Fall 1997), 31.

not discuss methods to collect, analyze or protect intelligence. Air Force doctrine acknowledges further that third world countries may not have the ISR capability to conduct effective intelligence operations, nor centrally process any human source information. But it does not advise on the importance that human intelligence plays in providing information on insurgent operations and covert networks. As described earlier, human provided intelligence is invaluable for the host government to isolate and pressure the insurgent organization. Marine Corps doctrine is much better in this regard, providing detailed information on what sources to use, how to collect and how to interpret information. In effect, Air Force and Joint doctrine identify the problem associated with intelligence processes in less-developed countries, but neither one provides suggestions to allow a point of departure for the reader to create solutions.

The second requirement was to recognize the technical capabilities and deficiencies of the host nation, and the potential political impact of US-sponsored aid to upgrade its capabilities. Air Force doctrine clearly identifies old aircraft, second rate maintenance, limited personnel and poor training as shortfalls in many third world countries. As a remedy, it recommends assessment teams determine if the host nation can achieve their objectives with their own assets. It further states that any externally supplied system should be maintainable within the host nation. Air Force and Joint doctrine also repeatedly stress the need to foster host nation control of the entire IDAD process. Air Force doctrine recognizes the dilemma of providing too much aid and cautions that provided aid should not lead to “self-generating requirements for increasingly higher levels of US military involvement.”¹⁸⁹ Essentially, Air Force doctrine identifies the issue

¹⁸⁹ AFDD 2-7.1, 56.

of recognizing host nation capabilities and limitations, but falls short in its discussion for resolving the problem. Although specific detail would mean to prescribe a recommendation to an unknown problem, Air Force doctrine could present possible solutions such as adapting non-US aircraft as suitable mission platforms.

The third requirement, recognize who “runs the show” and understand the degree of US Air Force control, is problematic for doctrine. Air Force doctrine does not discuss the roles and responsibilities of the country team, or its relationship to the military advisors. In contrast, Army doctrine lays out this information and provides possible command structures for military advisors. As for indigenous political and military command structures, Air Force doctrine admits the technological barriers of implementing a C2 network, but does not address the *cultural* aspects of the issue. On the other hand, Joint doctrine labels cultural differences as presenting the “most immediate challenge.” It acknowledges that culture, language, and other more technical differences may affect command, control and coordination. This issue is problematic because there are too many cultures with too many nuances to be addressed specifically in doctrine. However, the very fact that host nation culture and national character can present such an “immediate challenge” presents a clear case for educating airmen to a higher degree on these unique characteristics of the country prior to deployment. If this education is not done through doctrine, which is probably an inappropriate place for specific country information, then the Air Force must acquire appropriate country information through foreign area officers or country team briefs as appropriate.

The last requirement, develop a coherent air strategy that supports the objectives of the host country, certainly has ample experiential data on which to base an “authoritative”

solution. Air Force doctrine merely provides broad guidance by stating, "...the principal weight of air and space power should be applied where the government seeks critical points of leverage against the insurgent movement."¹⁹⁰ It further lists the four broad categories where airpower may serve the needs of the government: development, mobilization, security and neutralization. Instead of providing a practical guidance for airpower application, Air Force doctrine reinforces the notion that its strength is maximized only if coordinated in the overall IDAD strategy.

However, the US Air Force can provide better advice for airpower employment than current doctrine offers. At the very least, the Air Force should provide official histories of USAF involvement in counterinsurgency efforts, and perhaps recognize the successes of other countries that dealt with similar counterinsurgency challenges. Specifically, official histories on the strategy devised, actions taken and results of involvement in the case studies presented would provide airmen points of departure when advising in other counterinsurgency campaigns. Another solution is to include a discussion of possible uses of airpower in US Air Force FID doctrine. Professor Drew and Colonel Hardie both provide excellent discussions of the practical use of airpower in counterinsurgent operations.¹⁹¹ The essence of these papers could be distilled and placed in an appendix of AFDD 2-7.1 or presented in an Air Force doctrine document on a level similar to Joint Doctrine's Tactics, Techniques and Procedures. In this regard, the US Air Force, as the steward of airpower, must do better when providing guidance on air operations in counterinsurgencies.

¹⁹⁰ AFDD 2-7.1, 14.

¹⁹¹ Drew, *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency* and Colonel Robert L. Hardie, "Airpower in Counterinsurgency Warfare," unpublished report no. 3373, (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air War College, April 1967.)

Conclusions

This study presented two case studies dealing with US involvement in another country's war against insurgents. In Vietnam, the US provided a large amount of aid in the form of money, materiel and personnel. In addition, US airmen installed various C2 systems within the country to facilitate further US involvement. In doing so, the personnel of the FARMGATE detachment faced political and military challenges. Likewise, US trainers in El Salvador faced similar challenges, though with a much-reduced manning footprint in country. That one effort eventually failed and one effort eventually succeeded is not the issue. What is germane to this essay is, based on the shared experiences by airmen in these two cases, what are the major problems counterinsurgency operations present airmen, and does doctrine provide appropriate guidance to overcome these problems?

The case study analysis and the preceding discussion illustrate that current US Air Force and Joint doctrine lack the depth and detail necessary for guiding airmen as they develop courses of action to succeed against insurgents. Although US Air Force and Joint doctrine do offer broad guidance concerning the lessons previously developed from the case studies, one needs to turn to Army and Marine doctrine for in-depth coverage of intelligence and country team issues. Likewise, for developing a coherent counterinsurgency air strategy, Air Force doctrine falls woefully short of even providing a point of departure for airmen to construct a comprehensive air strategy.

The caveat to this conclusion is that US Air Force doctrine must maintain the flexibility to cover situations similar to, but *not the same as* the conflicts in Vietnam and

El Salvador. Never should the airman be content to accept doctrine as static or all encompassing. As a past doctrine has taught us,

Doctrine should be alive—growing, evolving, and maturing. New experiences, reinterpretations of former experiences, advances in technology, changes in threats, and cultural changes can all require alterations to parts of our doctrine even as other parts remain constant. If we allow our thinking about aerospace power to stagnate, our doctrine can become dogma.¹⁹²

Without becoming dogmatic, Air Force doctrine must once again evolve and mature to provide airmen with the guidance required to formulate cogent thoughts on dealing with problems associated with applying airpower in counterinsurgencies.

¹⁹² Air Force Manual 1-1, Volume I, Basic Aerospace Doctrine of the United States Air Force, March 1992,vii.

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